

MATTOCK

James Stevens



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MATTOCK

ALSO BY

JAMES STEVENS

PAUL BUNYAN

BRAWNYMAN

MATTOCK



James Stevens



Alfred A. Knopf
New York and London

MCMXXVII

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I

K. P.



It had seemed like we would never get to having any American spring weather in France, but this morning had turned out to be as fine an April one as I had ever seen. Everybody was remarking to one another about the unusual sunny day as they fell into the chow line, along with the usual talk about how they were hungry enough to eat the ears off a skunk. I was hungry enough, myself, and it was wonderful to whiff the smells of boiling coffee and frying bacon that drifted over from the company kitchen. The wet ground was steaming in the sunshine, and this steam had a hearty smell that was good for the appetite, too. Thinking of chow, and thinking of how the fields of young wheat used to steam up just exactly this way back in Kansas, I was actually forgetting my army troubles. But of course Horse Karsak and Pete Widdy had to remind me of my ten days of extra duty on k. p., and all the disgrace of it come back to bow me down again.

There I'd been for ten days. Down to the lowest place an infantry soldier could get, except being a guardhouse prisoner. Packing water and coal for the cooks. Peeling whole mountains of spuds. Washing greasy boilers and all the cooking and serving tools. Scrubbing out dishrags till they were snow-white, or Mess Sergeant Hoeffler would bawl his head off. Washing meat sacks, scouring tables, sweeping and sweeping the dirt floor of the kitchen. And

having to listen to Horse Karsak or Pete Widdy sneer about corporal's stripes turning into a k. p.'s dishrag.

Now I was soldiering again, but still they couldn't leave me alone. They were trying to shame me before the whole 1st Platoon, but I wouldn't lower myself to notice them. I let on like I didn't hear and went to talking about the fine weather to Gregorio Roderigo Domingos, the Portugee. Still, they made me feel miserable, and I was glad to hear the mess sergeant yell, "Fall in!"

The line began to weave and slide along. Hobnailed shoes chugged in the dirt. Everybody leaned out to see what the k.p.'s were dishing up from the steaming boilers on the serving-tables. Soldiers with filled mess kits began to string away from the kitchen, stepping carefully and holding their cups and kits level, moving on to the old barracks that was used as a mess hall.

All of a sudden this string began to ball up around a soldier who had come out of the 1st Platoon's barracks. Joe Beedy, who belonged to my squad, was the cause of the excitement. Both of his eyes were black and nearly swelled shut, his nose was red and bugged up, and his mouth was cut and bruised.

"Gawd, Joe, what hit you?" everybody was asking.

When I had got my chow and joined the mob around Joe, he was right in the middle of his story:

" . . . and I was settin' there peaceable, with Sophie on my lap, when in come four of the louse-bound engineers. One was a big sergeant, and the others started to kid him: 'Lookit, sarge, that infantryman's swiped your bon cherry madamozel!' 'You're outta luck, sarge!' 'Back to camp without no lovin' for you, sarge!' Just the like of that. And the damn lousy big sergeant bawls out, 'Haul feet, you blue-cord son of an ape, or I'll work

you down to the size they can bury in a vin roosh bottle!' And I shoves Sophie off my lap and cracks back at him, 'You'll need all the help you got, and then some, big boy!' Sophie, she up and flops her arms around the sergeant's neck, and screams, 'Non, non, sergeant! Pah boxay esee!' But he give her a shake that throwed her on her set-down; and that riled my Irish so's I swung a chair at his dome. But somebody hooked the chair; and the next thing I knowed I saw a whole skyful of stars from a wallop on the snoot; somebody tripped me from behind; then the whole gang put their hobnails to me; and finally they heaved me out, and all a yellin,' 'You tell the rest of your lousy doughboy camp guard they'll get the same if they don't stop sloughin' us engineers in the bull pen!' Well, I couldn't hammer up on a mob; so here I am, just like you see me.

"I'll tell you, gang, I don't give a whoop for myself, as I've been used to trouble all my life, and always expect to have it. But what I mean, how long is old Company F goin' to stand for a regiment of non-combatant ditch-diggers and road-graders to rough-house an outfit of real infantry soldiers any time they feel like it? I can get a transfer, and if we are goin' to stand for this kind of racket, believe me, I will!"

Everybody about forgot chow and went to cussing the camp engineers up one side and down the other, and swore all kinds of revenge, from ear-biting and eye-gouging on up to bloody murder on them. The wild talk kept running around the tables all through mess, especially among the old Chicago National Guard soldiers, who were the corporals and sergeants and a third of the privates.

"Four times these Camp 1 engineers has ganged up on

some lonesome Company F man, and it's one too many. Three, I'll tell the cockeyed world, was enough!" "The Hunyoks never wanted to fight in the first place, or they'd of enlisted in the infantry and not in no ditch-diggin' outfit. They got a gall, I'll say." "Yeah—tryin' to run the camp because they been here the longest——" "Nigger stevedores been here longer'n the engineers has. Guess the nigger stevedores'll be puttin' theirselves up with the infantry next——" " . . . as soon be beat up by a nigger stevedore as by a shovel-stiff engineer——" " . . . long we goin' to stand for it is what I want to know? Soldier our heads off and can't go to Bordaïre on a pass without a gang——" "Sap 'em when you're on guard and get half a chance. Frame 'em to slough 'em in the guardhouse. Let the prison guard put the frog-sticker to 'em if they make a false move. That's the——" "Listen to the old Halsted Street cop! He ain't wise! Oh, no!" "They'll get so sick of the infantry they'll throw up every time they see a blue hat-cord!" "Wait'll I'm on guard again and have a chance at one with my sap!"

That was the way the talk run back and forth, all of the soldiers listening hard, each one stopping a cup of coffee or a forkful of bacon half-way to his mouth and staring over it at somebody who was yelling a threat or a brag; then yelling something himself, shoving the coffee or bacon into his face and chewing savagely as he listened some more and got ready to yell another threat himself.

Most of the drafted men bawled threats and brags as loud as the National Guards did. But I was quiet. I knowed if I joined in Horse Karsak, or Pete Widdy, or somebody else would crack a fool joke about corporal's stripes that would mortify me to death, so I kept my mouth shut.

After mess I joined a line in front of the Headquarters Platoon's barracks. Four days before, we'd had our first pay-day in France. Most of the company had already been on pass to Bordaïre. The rest of us were giving our names to the first sergeant this morning and asking to go on pass tonight. I wasn't worrying much about the engineers, as they were not likely to bother anybody on the camp road or the main street of Bordaïre. I had never been in any of the dives and wineshops yet, and I had no idea of going around them tonight. I'd just buy some souvenir handkerchiefs, probably, and maybe a pair of fancy wrap leggins, then look around a little and come back. But it certainly would be a relief to get away from the camp and the joshing about corporal's stripes and dishrags for a while.

When I had got into the orderly room and given my name to the company clerk I saw the first sergeant talking mighty seriously to Sergeant Shevlin, Joe Beedy, and two other Chicago soldiers.

"Youse guys know the skipper well as I do," he was saying. "He's strict on this once-a-week stuff. I'll try to get you out, but there's a fat chance, I'll say."

"What if we tackled Johnny Hard?" said Sergeant Shevlin.

"Hell, he'd go with you and get busted from his bars. Lay off him and hang on to yourselves. You got time enough. This war's just started."

"All right. You got to work the skipper for the passes then. Gimme a pill and a match."

"Say, youse want me to smoke it for you, too?"

I figured it out that Sergeant Shevlin was going to take a gang to Bordaïre tonight and look for revenge on the engineers, and I couldn't help but hope that they wouldn't

get the passes. If the trouble between us and the engineers grew much worse, the first thing we'd know Captain Cornwall would stop passes altogether.

I tried to say as much to Pete Widdy when we were falling in for drill, but he wouldn't take it seriously; he only grinned and asked me if I was going on pass tonight, and when I said I was, he laughed again and said, "Kansas, don't you try battlin' any engineers. If you did, you'd be sure to get excited and pick on an officer, and then what you'd get would make your ten days of k. p. look like nothin'!"

He thought he was being funny because I had always been so serious about my orders when I was on guard and would turn every drunken soldier over to the corporal of my relief, and at last I had got into trouble by arresting a drunken officer one night. He had made the officer of the day believe he was really sober and that I had broken my general orders by refusing to present arms. How he had convinced the officer of the day I could never figure out, for when I arrested him, he couldn't talk anything but cusswords. But he had done it somehow, and I had got ten days of extra duty, and the men in the 1st Platoon who knowed me best, and who ought to have sympathized, had been joshing and laughing about it ever since.

But it was good to get back to regular soldiering again, anyway. The 3rd and 4th Platoons were on guard today, and the 1st and 2nd had eight hours of drilling. I felt awkward at first and Corporal Campanero rode me pretty hard in the squads-east-and-west drill; but by the time Captain Cornwall took the company I had remembered most of the complicated close-order movements; and when Sergeant Shevlin drilled the 1st Platoon by itself I never

made a bobble. In the afternoon we played three-deep and a lot of other games, and I was feeling real hearty again. It was the finest kind of April weather, the air smelly from the drying ground, the sunshine just kind of soft and warm and making the Colors over camp headquarters very bright against the blue sky.

After evening mess I took a good wash, shaved my face, combed my head, shined my russet shoes, was inspected by Captain Cornwall in the orderly room, and was given my pass without any trouble. It was just coming twilight when I started for the camp road, passing by our 1st Platoon barracks on my way. The quartet had begun harmonizing even before I went to the orderly room, and it was going so good now I had to stop and listen. Harmonizing was my weakness, if I'd ever had one.

"T-r-r-r-ink. T-r-r-r-ink," plunked a banjo.

And with it a lead and a baritone sung:

"Back home again in Indiana,
And it seems that I can see—"

Then Joe Beedy's feeling tenor and Dan Logan's flat bass, harmonizing:

"—that I can see—"

"T-r-r-r-ink. T-r-r-r-ink."

Then:

"The beaming candlelight still shining bright—"

"—shining bright—"

"Through the sycamores for me—"

"—always for me!"

"T-r-r-r-ink. T-r-r-r-ink."

And so they harmonized on about the new-mown hay sending all its fragrance through the fields I used to roam,

and when I dream about the moonlight on the Wabash, then I long for my Indiana home. As they repeated the last "Indiana home," Joe Beedy's feeling tenor sounded like he was almost crying, and Danny tried to make his voice a growly purr; and, oh, lordy, it did make me about ache all over to know how much better my bass was than Dan Logan's, but still I wasn't wanted in the 1st Platoon quartet.

No, I wasn't wanted. I'd finally figured that out after Joe Beedy and Doc Makin had told me several times that they were afraid harmonizing would take too much of my time away from studying my drill book and my general orders and that some of the quartet's favorite songs were not fit for a young man with a Kansas bringing-up to sing, anyway. I'd finally figured it out that these were just excuses. I wasn't wanted because they called trying to be a good soldier "duty-struck." They had the wrong ideas about me and seemed bound to misunderstand everything I would do. They called it "duty-struck" when I was on the road guard and would arrest a drunken soldier instead of calling somebody to help him get to his quarters. They called it "duty-struck" when I butt-striking a prisoner who would try to play sick and not stand at attention when the officer of the day came into the prison barracks. Then they wouldn't let me join the harmonizing, though I had the finest kind of a bass voice and a keen ear; and they had all joshed and laughed when I was drug into trouble for arresting a drunken officer.

Well, it couldn't be helped, but I had certainly got to feeling blue these last ten days; and I felt bluer than ever now as I sighed and tramped away from the barracks to the camp road. I ought to have been just the other way, as this was the second time I'd gone out on pass

during the five weeks we'd been in France; but, instead, listening to that harmonizing seemed to have made me the loneliest and homesickest I'd ever been, and I could have sworn at myself for doing it.

But I tramped on, at a fairly good lick. It was two miles of gravel road to Bordaie. The twilight had gone and the full moon had begun to shine by the time I left the gate guard. A little chill had come into the air, and I marched fast.

The gravel went "brunch" under each step of my hob-nailed russets. For half a mile, where hedges on each side of the road threw shadows to make it black, that "brunch, brunch, brunch" was the only sound I heard. The road turned into an open country, and there were farmhouses along. The land stretched away level and flat, much like the country back in good old Kansas. Sometimes a cow would make a sleepy moo; and once I heard pigs grunting crankily as they rooted for a place to sleep.

There was a creek which had poplar trees along its banks. Away out in a pasture the waters of a pond showed up brightly under the moon.

The country right here reminded me a lot of Swamp Creek, the tough neighborhood close to my home town of Clevisburg, Kansas, and it made my lonesome homesick feelings stronger than ever. Over yonder was a two-story square house that might have been the Swamp Creek store and dance hall. I could imagine Fords and buggy teams in the patch of trees this side of the house, and me out there with—with that giddy flirt of a Sade Nixon.

Sade Nixon. I knew from experience what a pitfall of temptation it was to remember her, but right now I simply couldn't help but think of Sade Nixon, the Swamp

Creek girl who had got me mired in sin two years ago, when I had grown into a regular young fool, weak enough to sneak out with the Collins boys to the Swamp Creek dances.

Brunch. Brunch. Brunch.

Going down the gravel road.

Yes, sir; I could almost believe this house was the Swamp Creek store and dance hall and that the Collins boys' Ford was setting over there in the thick shadows of an elm tree.

A cloud come slowly across the moon. The wind sunk to the smallest whisper. I stopped, and there wasn't a sound around. A curious eery feeling run over me, as I stood, and remembered.

Fiddle music for a waltz sounding softly down. Sade and I setting out alone in the dark. Me feeling crazier than ever about her, until she sort of sobbed, and said, "I'm in trouble, Parve."

"Trouble? Why—Sade—Sade——"

"And I guess you know whose fault it is."

"Whose fault? Looky here; I don't know nothin' of the kind!"

"Yes, you don't! You ain't been braggin' around about how I fell for you! Oh, no!"

"And I'm the only young feller you've gone with, ain't I? Oh, yes!"

"You know—why, Parve—you know—you——"

Then her busting into a regular bawling-spell, and me shivering all over for about a minute; but, in spite of my scare, I wasn't forgetting that other young fellows hung around the Swamp Creek dances, and that a girl like Sade Nixon was liable to get into trouble with any of them. And when she did, she would grab any chance to

haul out of it. Besides, if she hadn't gone crazy about me and led me on, I'd have been all right and stayed true to my bringing-up.

Arguing sense to myself that way, but still feeling for Sade; patting her arm, telling her to cheer up, and finally promising to help her all I could.

"You mean you'll marry me, Parve?"

And her almost choking me with her two arms before I could shake some sense into her head and make her see that the best I could do was to give her some money to go away on and that no other young fellow would begin to do as much.

That had been the worst time of my life, and it all come back to me as I stood on the dark road and looked at the house that was like the Swamp Creek store and dance hall.

How panicky I'd been in the days that followed! There'd been many a minute when I was about to do what wasn't right, by any honest way of thinking. I'd thought of running away to Kansas City and joining the navy, as Hod and Luke Collins's oldest brother had done when a Swamp Creek girl got him where she wanted him. For I couldn't know when Sade Nixon might break loose and tell everything; and even though I knowed I could prove she'd gone with other fellows, she could make a peck of trouble for me, and no mistake. But I wouldn't run off, because that would have broke Ma's heart; and so I'd decided that if Sade got foxy, I'd simply do like Tom Mockley.

Tom's pa was a Clevisburg storekeeper and a moneyed Methodist; and when Jen Dyer's pa had tried to force Tom into a shotgun wedding, Mr. Mockley and Tom had gone to Rev. Snodgrass and swore that Tom was innocent

as a lamb. So Rev. Snodgrass had preached a sermon about blackmailers, threatening them right from the pulpit; and the Dyers had quailed down. There was never any use in people like the Swamp Creek Dyers bucking the Clevisburg Methodists, and the Nixons didn't have any higher standing. They could have done no more against us Mattocks than the Dyers were able to do against the Mockleys.

But Tom had lied like a dog to his pa and the Rev. Snodgrass; and I had made up my mind that I wouldn't lie like no dog, but would do the best I could by Sade Nixon, unless she stirred up a stink. But she had kept quiet; and finally I sold two Holstein heifers for sixty dollars apiece; and then Sade had taken the money and left for Kansas City, promising never to try to bring disgrace on my family. I had never heard of her since.

Two long years ago that had happened, but I had never yet got over being sorry that I had let myself be dragged into temptation. For the Old Nick had throwed that holt on me, and he never let go. No matter how hard I would rassel him, the Old Nick would keep the holt he had got through Sade Nixon, and was forever trying to pull me down into the mire of wickedness, the darkness of sin.

I had never yielded again, but walked the straight and narrow path; and at every revival in Clevisburg I had strove my hardest to experience religion, so that I could be freed of the Old Nick and have a shield and buckler against him. I'd walked in the way I should go and prayed for the Light. But it had never come. And whenever I was downcast and low, always then the Old Nick would show his fiery face again, sing his tempting words, and strive to rassel me down for good and all.

More than ever now the dark trees around the house

looked like the place where the Old Nick had first thrown a holt on my soul.

For a second I thought I saw his face, the face of the Old Nick, smoky, and fiery, in the dark trees. And my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and my feet were as stones. Surely he would step out, out from that darkness, dressed in his red clothes, his snaky tail waving, and his serpent eyes blazing into mine!

The blazing black eyes that would throw a swimmy fire all around you and make hell burn in your blood.

Oh, they were there! Brighter and brighter they blazed in the dark. And then I could have sworn that I saw a rosy shining cloud around them and heard a soft hissing in the trees. I knew I should run, but my feet were as stones, and my heart began to pound.

I was froze to the spot, and I stood and stared until the blazing serpent eyes and the smoky red glow died out in a vision. It was Sade Nixon; not weepy and sad, as I had seen her last; but her pretty face had a loving smile on it, and her arms were stretched out to me. Back in my old home country. Back in the shadows and moonlight, under the elm trees, with pretty, loving Sade Nixon—and I prayed and I strove—but it was my hour of weakness—the time of my undoing—it had come again—and I stretched out my own arms.

Just that quick she was gone.

She was gone just that quick, as the cloud drifted away from the moon, and light showered around me. And that quick I was back in France, on a road to a French town, and with nobody in a thousand miles I could call my friend.

Brunch. Brunch. Brunch.

I was tramping on.

But the Old Nick was with me now. I knew it well. I could hear his whispers and feel his fire. I could see the bright and flowery road that leads only to the pit of perdition. I strove and prayed; but I wasn't a Christian Kansas young man any longer; I was a soldier away over in France, lonesome and homesick, downcast and low from my miserable army experiences. And the Old Nick kept his holt on my soul.

Brank. Brank. Brank.

Now I was on a stone sidewalk, and my hobnails made that sound at every step. The street was narrow and the houses were all crowded close to the sidewalk. The old Frog town put Kansas out of my mind.

Come over a little rise, and the main street of Bordaire sloped just ahead to the public square; and on beyond was the dock and the shining harbor water. My blood leaped up warm as I saw the lights of the café windows, and I simply couldn't help it. They might be dens of sin, but they certainly were places for good times. Frog wine and Frog women—how soldiers like Pete Widdy and Horse Karsak did roar and laugh when they talked about them!

Brank. Brank. Brank.

And now there were a lot of these sounds on the sidewalks, for I was in the square, and it was full of soldiers. Some were in pairs, some were in gangs, and a few had madamozels; and when I saw them all parading under the dim lights, my heart began to pound with an excitement that was harder and harder to keep down.

For a while I just stood with my hands in my pockets, leaned against an iron fence that ran around a statue, and looked on. A gang of nigger stevedores swaggered by,

laughing their hee-yah-yah-hoh-lordy laughs like they were too tickled to live.

"Sho fooled that aih Frog woman!" one was laughing. "She thought a niggah's allus black; and she wants know how come my tan satchel culluh; and I says, 'Ma'mzel, I'se a 'merican Injun, savvy voo!' Oh, boy! And she swallowd it! Hot damn!"

"Hee-yah-yah-hoh-lordy!" they all laughed.

Frog wine and Frog women—well, a soldier who'd had a bringing-up like mine and tried to be true to it over here in France certainly was bound to be lonesome and out of luck. S. O. L., as the soldiers said. I'd already begun to figure that out while I was doing the ten days of extra duty, and now I was certain and sure. It was an absolute fact; and I might strive and pray all I pleased, but I couldn't figure anything else out of my experiences.

Over and over, the words of an army song went to running through my head:

You're in the army now,
You're not behind the plow.
You'll never get well this side of hell—
You're in the army now!

It was terrible to believe, but certainly true. Here I'd been living according to my bringing-up all through my four months of army life, and see where it had brought me! Down to the lowest place in my company, where I was laughed and joked at by cursing, drinking, and gambling soldiers who never thought of duty any more than they had to, and who went out for nothing but sinful good times whenever they could. Most of them performed

worse than the Swamp Creekers did back home; but they gloried in their wickedness and flourished, while a man like me was sneered upon and cast down. No, sir; I couldn't figure it any other way; I was in the army now, and living like a Christian Kansas young man could bring me nothing else but trouble.

"The 1st, 2nd, and 26th are ready for battle now, I know," a supply-train soldier said to another one, as the two walked close to me. "I reckon the 47th will be movin' into the Toul sector in a few more weeks. Boy, the Boche'll know what real fightin's like before the summer's over."

"You tell 'em."

The 47th—that was our division. Well, they didn't know what they were talking about. Most of the soldiers in Company F imagined we'd do guard duty at Camp 1 until the end of the war. Even if we didn't, the corporals and sergeants all declared we'd need months of training before we could be ready for the front.

Still, it was bothersome to think about. What if the German army was to break through and we should be suddenly called to fight, training or no training? And what if I should come to an early end, with my soul mired in sin again? Caught that way on the road to perdition, with no time to repent! No, I simply didn't dare to take the risk; let them talk about Frog women and Frog wine all they pleased, let them joke and laugh at me all they wanted; but I was going to rassel the Old Nick down again and not risk my immortal soul!

You'll never get well this side of hell—
You're in the army now!

The song kept singing and singing through my head. It wouldn't go down. I argued and plead with myself, but I couldn't keep from looking at the bright café windows, and I couldn't keep from hearing the laughing talk of the soldiers and madamozels as they walked through the square. I tried to take myself from the tempting place, but my blood was stirred with the fire of the Old Nick himself, and I stood and lingered too long.

"'Allo, keed. You are by the lonesome, too?"

It was Gregorio Roderigo Domingos. His white teeth were shining in a wide, friendly smile, and his black eyes were sparkling under the coarse curly hair that stuck down from under his campaign hat. He spoke and looked so friendly that I forgot he was a black Portugee, and I wouldn't have cared, anyhow, he was driving so much of my lonesomeness away.

"Hello, Gregorio. Yeah, I'm by my lonesome, and I was just tryin' to figure out what to do with myself."

"Hell, you comea me, keed. I show you somesings mucha bon—good, you know."

"What you got on your mind, Gregorio?"

"I know where ees cognac—madamozels—wot you t'ink?"

"Well, now, Gregorio—I don't know—you see—looky here——"

You'll never get well this side of hell—

You're in the army now!

It simply pounded through my head, then it stopped with a fiery shock, and I felt myself trembling all over, while I was saying, "Hop-te-dody, Gregorio, old kid. Let's go!"

II

RAMPAGE



REGORIO marched across the square and turned down a narrow black alley. The dark was eery, there were rotten smells all along, and after we had gone two hundred feet or more away from the square, I got to thinking seriously about what I was letting myself be tempted into. And when I had begun to figure it out, a few sober shivers chilled my excitement down considerably.

The bright square and the streets were safe enough, with m. p.'s from the other companies of the 2nd Battalion all along, and I had hardly thought about engineers until now. But this infernal black, smelly alley brought them back to my mind. A gang of them could murder a man here, I thought, and he'd never know what struck him. Besides, it was probably out of bounds wherever Gregorio was going, and if the m. p.'s caught us, it would be the guardhouse. Thinking soberly this way, I begun to get some of my old strength back, and I was about to tell Gregorio I didn't believe I'd better go on, when he laughed and said, "One these ma'mzels is red head'. And fat. But no too Jeez fat, savvy voo. I gotta wan leetle blon'. You like these red head', hey, keed?"

Well, that made me excited again; and instead of figuring soberly, I argued to myself that Gregorio knowed where he was going, and wasn't looking for trouble any more than I was; and then, before I hardly knew it, I was

letting all holts go, breaking loose and saying, "Just show 'er to me, Gregorio, that's all!"

That had been the last struggle. The Old Nick had me now, and it seemed that with my yielding all my worry about him was gone. I raised my head, stepped high, and felt warm and fine.

We must have tramped three long blocks down the black, smelly alley when Gregorio took my arm and pulled me through a gate. We walked through a small yard, and stopped in front of what appeared to be a kitchen door. He knocked three times. It opened an inch.

"Gregorio, ma'mzel."

We were let into a long, narrow room lit by two candles. I felt considerably flustered, and for a minute or so I only shuffled from one foot to the other and gaped around.

The ceiling was low and black-beamed, the red walls were smoky and streaked. At the far side of the room was a tiny stove and a table covered with an old yellow oil-cloth. In the corner at the left of the door was a big scarred-up cupboard. There were three or four rickety chairs standing around on the red tile floor, and on the other side of the table there was a bench against the wall. In the narrow end wall at the left, and high as the top of the cupboard, was a small square window. At the right was a black door. The two candles sputtered and flickered from a shelf above the table.

I was just standing and taking it all in when I felt a soft hand pat my cheek. I looked down and saw a pair of blue eyes, a pile of frizzly yellow hair, and a smile that struck me as mighty pretty, for all the paint there was around it.

"Oo! Tray jolly—oo, la, la!" laughed the madamozel.

I felt more flustered than ever, but I was tickled, too, and I'd have been more tickled if I'd known that "tray jolly" meant I was handsome; but I thought the blonde was just taking me for a jolly customer, so I laughed and tried to act like one.

"Cognac, ma'mzel," said Gregorio. She smiled and nodded at both of us and went out through the black door. Gregorio pulled a chair up to the table and I did the same. "These cognac chasea your blues. Makea you feel fine, tray bon, savvy voo."

I couldn't think of anything to say, but just set there, grinning and watching the door. In a minute the blonde came back with a bottle and some small glasses. She poured one full for me, and one for Gregorio, and then she very calmly set down on his lap.

I looked at the wicked-shining glass in my hand and remembered the warnings that I had heard time and again from revivalists: "It is the first drink that damns your soul! Never take the first drink!"

I remembered the warning, and a shiver run over me as I got a glimpse of perdition yawning at my feet. I was not yet lost. There was still time to draw back. Oh, why had I weakened and let myself be dragged into this den of sin! But there was yet time to escape—if I only wouldn't set here grinning like a fool——

"What's a matter, keed?" asked Gregorio, smacking his lips. "She's no pois'. Damn gooda stuff—you see."

Well, it *was* too late. I simply couldn't throw the glass down and grind it under my heel as Rev. Snodgrass had always exhorted us young men to do when we were tempted to take the first drink. The Old Nick had got too strong a holt on me tonight. I had come too far down the bright

and flowery road to go back. Why, Gregorio would certainly tell my squad about it; and I could just see Pete Widdy throwing his canteen down, pretending like he was grinding it beneath his heel, and bawling, "Curse you, Demon Rum!" making everybody josh and laugh at me more than ever.

"'Atta boy!" laughed Gregorio.

There was a streak of fire down my throat and a regular blaze of it in my stomach. I choked and coughed, and I thought, "What on earth does anybody want to burn himself up that way for?" Then the burning stopped and the warmest, ticklingest glow began to rise and spread, floating up my sides, curling around my neck, dancing over my face, and finally making me feel such a warm, rosy brightness inside my head that I forgot about my stomach, and thought, "Hy golly, that's the first time I ever felt wonderful feelings inside my head in all my born days; I'd never believed that a man could get such pleasure out of feelings in his head; but these certainly can't be beat!" And I poured out another full glass of cognac, downed it quick, and let it burn.

"Onh, she's good, eh?" said Gregorio.

I only nodded, as I was enjoying the novel feelings in my head too much for words. And when we'd had another drink all around they got to dancing and sparkling in such a lively way that I didn't have any idea but to let all holts go completely.

"Hop-te-dody, Gregorio, old kid, I'm rearin' to go the whole hog," I said, roaring out a laugh and banging the table. "Where's that red-head you talked about?"

"Sheesa come," he said, and he and the blonde both laughed.

She did come in a little while, with a runt of a foreign-

looking soldier trailing her. Our hats were laying on the table, and when he saw them, he made straight for the door, holding his own hat behind him. I didn't think much about him, for I was getting an eyeful of the red-headed madamozel.

She was fatter than the little blonde, all right, and her face was painted like a new barn. But she did have a fine lot of red hair, and she smiled very kindly as she came over and sat on a chair by my side. I could feel myself blushing all over when she throwed her arm around my neck, but I didn't make a move to get away from her.

"Juh swee Dorine," she said, looking very brightly into my eyes. "Kel nom voo?"

"Juh swee Matt," I said.

"Matt, Matt, Matt! Rin, tin, tan!" Dorine laughed and kicked her heels.

I like to have laughed my head off at her joke, though I didn't know what it was. But it tickled me, anyway, and I took another glass of cognac. Then the little blonde wanted some money.

"Vank-sahnk franc, seel voo play."

I was glad to make a flash before Dorine, so I pulled out my roll and peeled off a twenty and a five-franc note like they were nothing. Dorine was playing with my hair as the little blonde stuck the notes into her stocking. And I got an idea.

"Tell Dorine I run a bank back in America," I said to Gregorio.

He laughed and shot a lot of Frog talk at Dorine. Her pale gray eyes got wide as saucers.

"Moan doo! See grand! See grand!"

The idea worked and she went to actually hugging me. We all had another round of cognac; and everybody went

to hollering and laughing; and it seemed like the first good time I'd ever had in my life. I felt so grateful to Gregorio I couldn't call him "old kid" often enough.

Right in the midst of all the fun three knocks sounded at the door.

"Marie!" called the blonde.

A black-haired madamozel showed up and opened the door. Three tough-looking, black-complected soldiers come in. Gregorio yelled at them in his own language and introduced them to me as three Portugee boys from Company E, which was doing guard duty on the lower docks. They were friendly with me and they acted very much at home. The table was pulled out from the bench, a madamozel called Blanchette came in, the blonde brought some more glasses, and we all set around the table and got hilarious.

Everybody had cigarettes going, I trying one myself, as I had learned to chew in the days when I was running wild at Swamp Creek, and wasn't afraid of nicotine making me sick. The room was soon full of smoke. In the foggy light the faces of the painted girls looked beautiful; and Dorine appeared like the most beautiful girl I'd ever met, even if she was painted like a new barn. She still set by me, with her head upon my shoulder, her cheek against my cheek, and her arm around my neck; and we drank cognac and smoked cigarettes together. It certainly seemed grand and glorious, after all the miserable army experiences I'd gone through. Every once in a while I'd think, "Well the Old Nick's got me at last." And then I'd think again, "Well, what do I care? I'm having a good time for once in my life, anyway."

I paid for another bottle of cognac, and then everybody was friendlier than ever.

The Portugees went to singing in their own language, and I bragged on them so much that they tackled some of the army songs, and I joined in with my bass. When we had finished "You'll Never Get Well," I said, "What the hell do we care whether we ever get well or not?"

Gregorio and his friends got the joke and roared over it. I chuckled myself, as it seemed like a pretty good crack.

By and by Gregorio and the blonde went out into the other room; and in a minute Blanchette and Marie and the other three Portugees followed them.

I and Dorine were alone.

And I didn't hesitate a minute. I started right in to make her come my way; and she was coming right enough, too, though she was pretending she was scared half to death, when three raps sounded at the door again.

Dorine slipped off my lap and went to the door, straightening her red hair and smiling back at me as she went.

"Le genee," she said, when she had looked out.

I had no idea of what a "genee" was, or it would have taken a sledge hammer to have opened that door. But I didn't know, so I let Dorine open it. And there was the runt who had slipped out a little while before; and now his hat was on, and there was an engineer cord around it.

He was such a runt that I never felt any scare of him. I only scowled as he stepped inside, but the next second I felt my heart pounding clear down to my boots, for it looked like a whole battalion of engineers was crowding through the door. A big-shouldered sergeant was leading them. He stopped and glared around.

"Thought you said they was two," he snapped at the runt.

"They is, Sarge. The wop's with Blondy, mebbe so."

"We'll get 'im!"

Then he started for me, the mob crowding behind him, growling to one another about the lousy infantry camp guard, and scowling looks at me fit to kill. I jumped up from my chair and backed into the far corner; and it felt like I was simply freezing there as the big-shouldered sergeant came on.

"How do you part your mustache?" he snarled, glaring right into my eyes.

"I ain't—ain't got no mustache," I said, not being able to think of another thing.

"Well! Boy, I'll give you one!"

I saw the flash of his fist coming up, but I still felt froze and could only shut my eyes. Then all my teeth seemed to be knocked in; I felt a tremendous dazing thump on my head; and the whole room—the smoke, the walls, the scowling faces, and the O. D. uniforms—just swum in a blaze of stars!

It felt like I was falling off a cliff; and away up in a starry sky Dorine's voice was screaming, "Non! Non! Non!" Then a ripping pain shot over my ribs and like to have set me crazy. And my head come clear in a flash.

I was down on the floor and I could see brown army shoes jumping all over the red tiles. One of them was swinging at my ribs again. I grabbed it with all my might. And the sergeant came down on top of me. He struck the table as he fell, the cognac bottle dropped on my arm and rolled into my hand. The sergeant was reaching for my throat. I swung the bottle. It broke over his forehead. And he spread out limp, with his face an awful red smear.

As I staggered to my feet a bottle smashed on the wall over my head and I saw bottles and glasses flying and smashing everywhere. The room was a madhouse. Gregorio and the other Portugees were heaving bottles

from beyond the black door, which was hanging on one hinge. Dorine was huddled behind the cupboard, screaming as loud as she could yell. A flying bottle caught an engineer on the jaw and he went down in a heap at her feet. Dorine fainted on top of him. Back in the other room the madamozels were screaming in hysterics. With the screams, the smashing of glass, and all the cussing and yelling, it seemed like nothing but an infernal madhouse all around me; and I could only just stagger to a corner and feel froze and sick and say over and over to myself, "Oh, lordy, got to get out of here! Got to get out of here, oh, lordy!"

But there was only the one little window, and I was caught like a rat in a trap. All I could do was crouch down in a corner. Two engineers started for me. I like to have went crazy when one swung his fist at me, a yelling, "I'll cave your head in, you infantry he-street-walker!" as he did. But when he had cracked me twice on the jaw, it seemed like I was being murdered, and I started to fight back like a wild man. A thumb jabbed into my mouth and I clenched down on it. The engineer's face twisted up and he screamed and howled, but I gripped his arm and kept clenching down on that thumb.

The other engineer swung back a bottle, but before he could hit me, Gregorio had jumped in from the other room and was slashing at him with a knife. Then the other three, with their knives out, made a grand rush, and the cowardly engineers clawed over one another like wildcats to get out through the door. Just that quick the mob had heaved itself outside, with Gregorio the last to go. A yell rolled in from the alley: "Beat it! The m. p.'s!"

I turned the engineer's thumb loose then and started to run, but he took a cowardly swing at me, and the next

think I knowed I was getting up, staggering to the door, and meeting an m. p., who stared down at the three knocked-out engineers, at Dorine, and then up at me——

“For Gawd’s sake! For Gawd’s sake!”

I chilled all over as I thought that now I was arrested. My fearful scare died down, and so did my fighting excitement. My head went to aching like it would bust. My stomach felt cold and sick. Everything in the room went swimmy and dim—the crumbly piles of glass all over the red floor; the three engineers, one of them laying still, the other two beginning to roll and groan; Dorine, still in a faint, with her red hair strung out in a muss of blood——

And then I seemed to be borne up and floated away in the dark, with far-away whispers sounding all around me: “Here, sarge; gotta get this bird to the hospital first—yeah, he’s our regiment. Company F, see—bloody, oh, Jeezus!—fightin’ damn’ fool, I’ll say—cleaned a whole mob—that’s the old 185th spirit for you—here, boy, hold your head up, now—give a lift——”

And I didn’t know any more until I was getting a shot for lockjaw, and was having eight stitches sewed in my scalp. Sick! I’d never dreamed a healthy man like me could be so infernally loathsome sick. And it wasn’t all from cuts and bruises, neither. I could almost forget them, as the doctor sewed up my head and I laid quiet and miserable, feeling a holy horror of being a guardhouse prisoner, but knowing I deserved it all for letting the Old Nick get a holt on me so that he could tempt me into the second big sin of my life.

III

A CHRISTIAN AMERICAN SOLDIER



MY HEAD throbbed and throbbed and I could not go to sleep, though the hospital cot was the comfortablest bed I'd had since I left home for the army camps. My head throbbed, my nerves shook, and my mouth, jaw, and ribs all ached. But the most I suffered was from the torment of thinking about how I would be a guardhouse prisoner, bayoneted and butt-striked around under strict orders; and, oh, the shame and disgrace that would be brought on the folks at home!

"You'll probably get off with ninety days and ninety days' pay," the gabby pill-roller orderly had said as he left me in the cot.

He had meant to cheer me up, but he had really cast down my last hope. For now I was certain that the m. p.'s would bring charges against me and that I'd be a guardhouse prisoner for ninety days, at the very least, and more likely for six months. I could see my finish then. The officers had warned us against trying to get ourselves into the guardhouse with the idea of keeping away from the front; for companies of prisoners would be sent up to the most dangerous places on the line, the officers said, to dig trenches and put up barb-wire fences; so, if we wanted to stay all together, we'd better keep out of the guardhouse.

Even if I only got the ninety days, I'd have to write

home during that time, and the censorship rules would make me sign my name Prisoner Parvin Mattock; and Ma in her grief would probably go to Rev. Snodgrass, and my shame and disgrace would be talked all over Clevsburg; and how could I look anybody in the eye when I was home again?

Oh, if I had only kept my strength and rassed the Old Nick down! If I had only gone on being sober, serious, and dutiful, not trying to arrest any more drunken officers, of course, but just being the kind of Christian American soldier our regiment minister had preached about, unmindful of scoffing and sneers!

Couldn't there be any way out of this terrible trouble at all? Maybe I could tell the court martial I didn't know where I was going when I went down the alley with Gregorio, and that the fight started before I knew a thing about it—and now, come to think of it, I was just the same as innocent about that, and if I could only stand up and declare I was—— But then I remembered that Gregorio and his friends had got away, and only the Lord knew what stories they would make up for themselves if I told on them—and what lies the engineers might tell—and the place was out of bounds, anyhow—it was just a muss, a terrible muss.

I laid there in the soft cot, on my back, blinked my eyes in the dim light of the ward part of the time, kept them shut part of the time, and all of the time pictures of everything that might happen to me raced around and around in my mind, while my head throbbed, my nerves shook, and I seemed to ache all over.

“Oh-ah! Oh-ah!” came a yelling groan from a supply-train soldier who had got his insides smashed when his truck turned over.

He was up in the middle of the ward, and his hair-raising groans roused up everybody around him. There were no wounded soldiers from the front in this hospital, the gabby pill-roller had told me, but only S. O. S. soldiers who had been hurt in the stevedoring, construction, and railroad work, which was using hundreds of thousands of men all along the lines of communication. There were a hundred and fifty or more in this ward, and a lot of them went to groaning and cursing at the yelling truck-driver. After a while he was only sort of sobbing and the ward began to quiet down.

But I still laid wide awake, aching and thinking more miserably than ever. The army life was simply too much for me, that was all there was to it. So terribly different from all I'd known back there in Kansas. Back there in the old home town with my old home folks I'd never knowed how lucky I was. And I'd never appreciated it; never appreciated Clevisburg, or the fine neighbors, or Ma, or anybody. But how fine everything seemed, as I laid and ached here in the hospital cot! If I could only go and lay my head in Ma's lap and talk to her and ask questions just one more time again, how wonderful it would be! Here in the army I didn't have one friend. Not a friend, and blamed if my eyes didn't get all wet as I laid there thinking about it.

With that a calmness came over me, and pictures of the old life at home began to float through my mind. I was seeing Ma as she was on my last morning at home; there in the kitchen she was so proud of, the aluminum kettles, scoured and bright, under a shelf over the white sink, the extra dishes shining behind the glass doors of the cabinet, the breakfast table pretty with a red and white checked cloth, the range shiny with enamel and nickel.

There was my dear old lady herself, with the hot-cake turner in her hand, looking down through her specs at the bubbly white tops of the cooking hot cakes, while she sung low to herself:

“Happy day! Happy day!
When Jesus washed my sins away!”

Ma would always sing low to herself when she was cooking breakfast; she had done it ever since I could remember. And I could always tell by the song she would sing how her disposition was. When she was most at peace, Ma would sing such serious religious hymns as “Nearer, My God to Thee” and “Rock of Ages.” When her soul was troubled, she would sing the brighter hymns like “Let the Blessed Sunshine In” and “Happy Day.” And that last morning Ma had sung low to herself:

“He taught me how to watch and pray
And live rejoicing every day——”

Well, she was seeing her own only big old boy, as she had always called me, go away to the army camps that morning; and though both of us thought the war would be over and I’d be back home by spring, still the dear old lady was terribly troubled to see me go. I had come late to her and Pa, when they were both over thirty and had about give up hope. I was all she had. And Pa——

My good old pa. It was stormy that late November morning; and Pa didn’t hardly eat a thing, but just set and clawed at his whiskers and gazed out through the rainy window light at the barn and the brown prairie fields on beyond. It had struck me then for the first time that Pa was showing his age. He had worked mighty hard

to build up this one hundred and sixty as a fine place to pass on to me, his only son. I noticed his red, wrinkled, knobby old hand was sort of nervous, and that his whiskers had quite a bit of gray coming into the brown, and that his hair was looking uncommon thin. And Pa hadn't set as straight as he used to set. He had just got over a bad spell of the asthma, too. It had been coming on him worse every winter.

Pa had always been as good as gold to me, agreeing with Ma that I should never be broke down with farm work like so many boys were; and the summer the draft come I'd got to thinking I wasn't helping him as much as I was able, had him let the hired man go, and went to working my head off on the place. Pa had declared himself that he didn't see how he could get long without me now and that I ought to claim exemption; but when I'd heard that some gossip was going around about how remarkable it was that Parve Mattock had suddenly growed so ambitious, I clumb on my high horse and was too proud to claim it. I argued with Pa that the war would certainly be over by spring, anyway, and that only the riff-raff regular-army soldiers would get into the fighting.

"Don't you be too dang optimistic, Parvin," Pa had said, shaking his head. "Don't you be too sure this war'll be over in a jump, just because Uncle Sam has pitched in. Remember what your grandpappy used to say about everybody thinkin' the Civil War would be over in a month, before the Battle of Bull Run. I tell you this war's a muss, and I'd give a sight to see it done with. Still, I could of expected it, and it's what I deserve, me, a lifelong Republican, votin' for a Democrat because he said he'd kep' us out of war."

I had only laughed at Pa's common sense. But here I

was, over in France, with a busted head from a drunken rampage, due for an early end in a prisoner company at the front, maybe, and the shame and disgrace of ninety days in the guardhouse, at the very least, never knowing if I would ever see home again.

The leavetaking at the Clevisburg depot came to my mind. Was that actually to be my last sight of my old home town and my old home folks? It had seemed like I was just going off to a picnic then.

Though it was rainy and cold, about the whole town had gathered to see us drafted men leave. Everybody cheered and laughed. They loaded us down with stuff to eat. The train pulled in.

"Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!" "Don't forget to send me a spike helmet, Herb!" "Bring the Kaiser home to Clevisburg, boys!" "You eight boys'll be good for a thousand Huns!" "Watch out for them sassy French girls!" "We'll come to see you when you get to Berlin!" "Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!"

Nobody had really believed we'd ever go overseas, or there wouldn't have been so many jokes made about bringing home the Kaiser, and so on. Still, it was likely we'd be gone till spring, everybody thought; so there had been plenty of crying along with the hugging, kissing, and joking of goodbye.

Ma had vowed to Pa that she wouldn't cry in public; but she broke down, anyhow; she broke down and cried just as the sun shone through the rainy clouds for a little while, and lighted up her old face.

Then it seemed like no time at all till I had said goodbye to her, and to Pa, and to Elsie Snodgrass, and to everybody else, and was on the moving train.

"Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!"

The clouds had thickened again and it was dark and drizzly around the people on the platform of the Clevisburg depot.

For a minute I forgot my army troubles, and was only sick to think that might be my last sight of my home country. Right now everything back there seemed so fine. Even the rainy late fall and the blizzardy winter days. Even the worst of the summer season, when a mower seat was too hot to set on and choking dust was blowing over the flat prairie fields. When the horses were in a lather the day long, and the cows drowsed under the elm trees by the pond. For you always knowed the finest time of the fall was coming, with the harvest done, and then grain-hauling through wonderful golden days.

Grain-hauling was never work that would break a young fellow down, and I had hauled ours ever since I finished the eighth grade, at the age of seventeen, and quit school. Our place was only three miles out, so I would make two trips a day. And wait around in the evenings till Elsie Snodgrass, who was teaching in the primary school, would be free, and then we'd go to Harve Thresher's confectionery and have an ice-cream soda together. After my trouble with Sade Nixon I had gone strictly with Elsie, who was pure and good as gold, as anybody could tell just by looking at her. But sometimes Elsie would have to stay in with her scholars, and then maybe I'd meet her kid of a cousin, Lola Bandon, as she come home from high school——

"Oh-ah! Jeezus! J-e-e-e-zus! Oh-ah!"

I almost swore when the truck-driver's groaning yell brought me back to myself, for I had actually begun to feel peaceful, and thinking about that funny kid of a Lola Bandon, I might have gone off to sleep in a minute.

But now I was brought back to my army troubles, and I ached and shivered with them for I don't know how long, before I could get to thinking of the folks back home again.

It seemed easier to think of Lola Bandon than anybody else just now, so I did. Lola was a seventeen-year-old high-school kid, and, as I had always told Elsie, I felt like a big old brother towards her. She had been orphaned as a baby, and the Snodgrasses had raised her like one of their own. Her ma, Mrs. Snodgrass's youngest sister, had eloped with Art Bandon, of the Swamp Creek Bandons; and naturally he had gone back to violating the state prohibition law no sooner than they were married; and finally he got rip-roaring drunk at one of the Swamp Creek dances; his colts broke away from him as he drove home, and he and Lola's ma were both killed in the runaway. Lola, who was a year-old baby then, had never got a scratch. All of our Clevisburg folks had always told the story as a miracle, but some had shook their heads over it, and wondered if the baby being saved was for the best, after all, as she had the wild blood of the Swamp Creek Bandons, and no telling what might come of her.

But I had always stood up for Elsie's kid of a cousin; for it was as I said, she had made me feel just like a big old brother towards her. We could certainly have a jolly time together. There was that last night, when we had played the piano and sung in the Snodgrass living-room, and waited for Elsie to come downstairs. Lola was a dandy on the piano, and with my fine bass voice it was always a lot of fun for us to play and sing together.

We must have sung a dozen songs that night before Elsie came down. Laying here in the hospital cot, I felt

a warm glow all over and I almost completely forgot my army troubles in remembering that far-away scene.

A small shaded light over the piano, and the only other light being from the reading-lamp, where Rev. Snodgrass set with his *Christian Advocate*. Lola looking almost grown-up, setting in the soft mixed lights and shadows, her wavy brown hair done up in puffs over her ears, her figure already womanlike, and with even the little brown freckles on her arms and hands looking beautiful as her lively fingers danced over the piano keys.

What a fine song that last one was! We must have sung the chorus four times:

“Send me away with a smile, little girl;
Dry the tears from your eyes of brown.
It’s all for the best, and I go with the rest
Of the boys from my old home town.
It may be forever we part, little girl;
It may be for only a while.
But if fight, dear, we must, in our Maker we trust—
So send me away with a smile!”

I could never forget the wonderful words of that song, or the beautiful tune, neither. When we had finished singing it, Lola’s hands dropped from the keys; and she looked up at me and smiled; and I looked down at her and smiled; and it had seemed like neither one of us could think of a word to say. I’d forgot Rev. Snodgrass, and I don’t know what I’d have done if Elsie hadn’t come down just then. But when I looked up and saw her very slender figure, in a long, tan dress, and gazed into her serious gray eyes, I had lost all my kid feelings and was a grown-up young man again.

The rest of that evening was very dim in my mind.

Elsie couldn't carry a tune to save her soul, so there hadn't been any more singing. Lola had gone to her lessons; and Elsie and I had gone into the parlor, where we talked very seriously about the war, and never let ourselves get sentimental.

Then there had been a spell of saying goodbye to Rev. and Mrs. Snodgrass; and while it was going on I had noticed Elsie looking over some of Lola's lesson papers.

"What a mess you've made of your algebra!" I heard her say. "Goodness, Lola, what a little fool you are!"

That had always been Elsie's way with Lola. I had never said anything to her about it, as we never got really engaged, and I didn't have the right, but once I had spoken to Ma. She looked at me mighty sharp over her specs and declared that any girl with the wild blood of the Swamp Creek Bandons needed nothing so much as to be strictly watched and kept in the way she should go, or no telling what might happen. I never said any more, as Ma seemed to suspicion that I might be smitten on Lola, when I never was, as she was only a kid, and I just felt like a big old brother towards her.

Still, it made me feel about as good as anything could right now, to lay here and remember how her brown eyes had sparkled that last night, and how lovely she had seemed in every way, even in the little freckles on her arms and hands. If I was to ever get back home and married to Elsie, I'd certainly always look out for Lola——

"God! God! God!" The moaning yell rung down the ward and about lifted me from the cot. Over and over the yell sounded: "God! God! God!"

Then a lot of other groans and growls rose up with it: "Oh, for Christ's sake! Can't nobody quiet that bird down? Oh, for Christ's sake!" And it was awful to listen

to until the orderly had called a doctor and they gave the yelling truck-driver something to ease his pain.

He was quiet now, but I wasn't any nearer sleep than ever. My nerves were all on edge again, my head was throbbing like sixty again, too; and I couldn't think of the fine old days and the folks in Clevisburg any more, but my thoughts were bound to ramble and ramble around over my army troubles.

The depot brigade at Camp Funston; then a troop-train ride to Camp Grant, Illinois, where I went to the hospital with the grip and was separated from the Kansas boys; and finally to Camp Mills with a bunch of Wisconsin and Illinois drafted men who were filling the 47th Division to war strength, and to a buck private's place in Company F of the 185th Infantry. Drilling and drilling, then, in the freezing and stormy Long Island country of New York, where the January and February weather made a blizzardy Kansas winter seem like April days. Then the first days on the *Osawatomie*, when I was so sick at the stomach; then the dreary days when the old transport heaved, lunged, rolled, and shook as she beat her way through rough, slaty waves, and under a smoky sky; then that wonderful Sunday morning when we steamed into the smooth, shining waters of the big French bay, when we knowed that before long we'd have dirt under our feet to roam around on, and get a chance to take a bath and wash some clothes, and rid ourselves of the shivery crawl of cooties in our underwear.

But it was on that same beautiful Sunday morning that my army troubles had really begun. At Camp Grant I had been down with the grip, at Camp Mills I'd had a terrible time drilling in the freezing weather, learning the complicated school of the soldier, and bothered half to

death at the same time by underdrawers that were four sizes too big and britches that were two sizes small, and on the transport I'd been sick at the stomach and worried about submarines; but it was on that Sunday morning that I had been inspired by the exhorting sermon of the regiment minister and had taken the narrow and stony path of the Christian American soldier.

The regiment minister had set his flag on top of the cabins between the 2nd Battalion's deck and the front one. The band made a half-circle and played the French "Marsel Lays" song and our own beautiful "Star-Spangled Banner." We stood at salute while the horns blowed and the drums beat out the rousing music. The minister stood at salute, too. He was a heavy-set, fleshy man, with a dark complexion and thick, curly hair. He looked very fine in his officer's uniform, with Old Glory waving out brightly at his side. The sunshine had lighted it so that the flag was mighty glorious to see.

After the music the minister had said a prayer; then he smiled out on us; and finally his expression became solemn and exalted, and he swung into the rousingest exhorting sermon I'd ever heard in all my born days.

He had started his sermon with a fearful picture of the hellishness of the Huns who would fight us when we got to the trenches; and for all their hellishness and frightfulness the minister called down on them the wrath of Almighty God.

He told about the wicked Kaiser, the vile Crown Prince, the monsters of Hun officers and junkers, and the savage Hun soldiers who raped girls and butchered babies; and on all of their loathsome tribe the minister called down the wrath of Almighty God.

He told how the Hun soldiers had tore up the lovely

and peaceful French country, laying it in dreadful waste everywhere; then he pictured how the Huns' own country had never been harmed or laid waste at all; and the minister prayed that it should be swept and ravaged by the wrath of Almighty God.

He softened down then and almost got a sob in his voice as he pictured our own dear folks at home, showing how their hearts were all with us; and they were all rejoicing, too, he said; for stronger than their pain of being separated from their loved ones was their desire to see each of us do his bit as an instrument of the wrath of Almighty God.

I'd never forget the minister's last words, not to my dying day: "Your loved ones ask it of you! America asks it of you! Almighty God asks it of you! Sacrifice everything to be loyal and true! Be willing instruments, that Almighty God's fierce and vengeful wrath may sweep the hellishness of the Huns from His beautiful earth! Onward, Christian American soldiers!"

And I'll tell you there wasn't a face there that wasn't flushed up, and there wasn't an eye without a shine in its look, as the minister of the regiment stood with uplifted eyes and outstretched hands at the end of that powerful exhortation.

I had never been so near to experiencing religion in my life; and it is very likely I would have if the regiment minister had made a plea for us to come forward. Even some of the worst cursers and gamblers among the Chicago soldiers had been heartily shaken.

But I was about the only one in Company F who had really taken the exhorting sermon to heart. After we had landed and relieved a Marine company of the Camp 1 guard, I never missed a chance to do my best as a Chris-

tian American soldier. If it was our Christian duty to strictly mind every one of our orders, why, I was going to show the officers that I was one who'd been brought up to know what Christian duty was, even if the swearing, gambling soldiers did scoff and sneer at me about it.

Whenever I had one of the eight posts in the camp prison barracks, I would make all the prisoners toe the line exactly on the orders laid down for them. Whenever I had a post on one of the camp roads, I turned over to the corporal of the guard every soldier who came in drunk or without a pass, whether he was a Company F man or not. I'd always kept my equipment in shape for the inspections. I'd never crabbed when my turn came for a day on kitchen police. When I had my first pass to Bordaire, I never done a thing but march straight to town, buy some stuff in the department store, drink some chocolate in the Y.M.C.A., and march straight back to camp again. In fact, I'd never missed a chance to show the officers what a real Christian American soldier I could be, and I'd felt very superior to the jokes about corporal's stripes, and so on, until I'd tried to arrest the drunken officer.

And then—oh, I knowed now that was intended for my great trial! I knew it well. But I had lost my strength; I had yielded to the Old Nick; and here I was, with the Almighty only knowing what punishment was ahead!

All beaten and bunged up, laying in a hospital cot, too achy and shivery to sleep, knowing I'd be hauled up for a court martial when I was sent back to the camp in the morning.

Ninety days as a guardhouse prisoner, at the very least. And Ma and all the Clevisburg folks would know my shame and disgrace.

Shame and disgrace—the old folks and the old home town—Elsie and Lola—Swamp Creek—Sade Nixon—the regiment minister's sermon—my trial and fall—around, around, and around my mind kept going and going, for hours upon hours, it seemed.

I could not go to sleep until my mind had actually got numb from thinking, and then it seemed like I just sunk away.

“God! God! God!”

The smashed-up truck-driver was yelling again, but he only roused me for a second.

Far off it seemed a voice was mumbling: “Guardhouse—guardhouse—guardhouse——”

But it didn't even bring me a shiver now. I was sinking down, down; away down in a deep, warm dark; and everything but the foggy drowsiness of going to sleep was left above.

IV

OLD COMPANY F



HAT the hell do you think you are, a whole damn army?"

First Sergeant Novak growled that at me as soon as I stepped into the orderly room of the Headquarters Platoon barracks. When I opened the door, the first sergeant had been setting at his desk, glaring down at a typewriter, poking the keys with two stubby forefingers, and making the machine jump and shake at every lick. He was still glaring when he looked up at me and growled out the fool question, then a tough grin spread over his face.

"So you been puttin' it over on us, huh? You're Knock-out Kansas, the Clevisburg Kid, in disgust, hey?"

The company clerk, who had turned sideways in his chair, thrown his arm over the back of it, and was jabbing a pencil back and forth in his hand while he grinned up at me, laid back and simply haw-hawed at this would-be joke, and the first sergeant chuckled himself.

I stood on first one foot and then the other, swallowed hard a few times, and couldn't say anything. I knowed I looked a sight, with my head all bandaged, and my mouth cut and swelled, and the first sergeant probably couldn't help but laugh and joke at me; but I couldn't laugh myself, for my head still throbbed and felt big as a punkin, and I was simply sick to know what was to happen next in my army troubles.

First Sergeant Novak rose up and stepped over to me before I could make a move to back away. I felt his powerful stub of a hand close over my right arm. And I remembered how he had been a steel-mill skull-cracker before the war, and how with one twist of his hand he had ripped the sleeve from a soldier's blouse in a three-deep game one day. But now he was still grinning about his joke. It was a tough grin, that showed all his teeth and pushed his rough cheeks up until they nearly shut his eyes. His black hair seemed to bristle more than ever as his hand clamped my arm.

"Bigga da mus', all right," he said, still grinning, "Why the hell ain't you showed some of this cold-cockin' stuff before?"

I was sure he was only laughing and joking at me, but when he stepped back, I got the courage to speak up on the story I'd figured out to tell.

"Sergeant," I said. "Sergeant, it was the engineers started everything, and I can prove——"

"Say, what are youse tryin' to hand me a spiel for? The A. P. M., who was a sergeant in this company before the war, brought out his m. p.'s' report himself. Don't try to give *me* nothin', for I know it all. You report to Lieutenant Hute in his quarters right now. That's the orders and you tell it to him, see. Make 'er snappy."

I felt too cold and sick at my stomach to try to argue. I just about-faced and made for the door. Glancing back as I went out, I noticed that the first sergeant and the company clerk were both laughing, and that made me more miserable than ever. So they were glad to see me get into trouble, too, though they were non-commissioned officers themselves and hadn't ought to hold it against me, even if I had been duty-struck. But they did. I could

never get any sympathy for being beat up by the engineers, as Joe Beedy had, and somehow it made me feel about desperate. I had been beat up, caught by the m.p.'s, and all of Company F would only joke and laugh, because I'd got in bad by trying to be a Christian American soldier. And the worst of it was that I had let the Old Nick throw a strangle holt on my soul, and I was as good as lost.

I dragged on past the three tar-paper barracks which were the homes now of our four main platoons. Over at my right was the company kitchen, in a tar-paper shed. Tub Hoffman, the meat cook, grinned and waved at me from a window. He was one of these fat, good-natured Dutchmen and had been pretty fair to me when I was on k. p. But I pretended not to see him, for he had joshed me a lot and would probably do it now more than ever.

Ahead of me was a road. It ran on to the left, past our 1st Platoon barracks, on past the prison barracks, and through rows of others which were used by supply-train, quartermaster, and engineer soldiers. Up by the prison barracks another road forked off to the right. On this road's left were the camp headquarters, the Y. M. C. A. hut, and the officers' barracks. On the road's right was a drill-field and the barracks of the nigger stevedore regiments and the nigger bakery company. Around the camp were monster hedges, and beyond the hedges were mouldy-looking farmhouses and muddy, greening fields.

Over on the drill-field Captain Cornwall, Lieutenant Dill, and Lieutenant Bucoda were taking the 3rd and 4th platoons through company close-order. "Squads left! *Ho!*" Now they were marching in company front. "Hup! Hup! One—two—three—four! Pick up that step—watch that alignment—more interval in the third squad, there

—hold 'er, hold 'er,—straighten that piece, you—you, I mean, straighten 'er—heads up!" the platoon sergeants were calling. And they did have a good line. Every one was in step. Woomp. Woomp. Woomp. Woomp. At every step a hundred feet struck the dirt together. Captain Cornwall, marching backwards, looking up and down the ranks, let them hold the company front until they reached the road. "Squads right about!" was the captain's command. "Squads right about!" snapped Lieutenant Bucoda and squeaked Lieutenant Dill. "*Ho!*" the captain shouted. Woomp. Woomp. Woomp. Woomp. "Left by squads!" ". . . by squads." "*Ho!*"

I knowed I should go right on, but I couldn't help watching for a second. The soldier life in Company F, the drills, formations, guard duty, and so on, had never struck me before as being fine and wonderful in themselves, but they did now. The formations for revelay, drill, and retreat, with all the soldiers streaming out of the barracks and bunching up in the company street, where they would stand and hitch their belts and sidearms around, rub dust and rust specks off their rifles, and kid and joke one another till the first sergeant would yell, "Fall in!"—why I could feel actually homesick for that now, as I saw months of guardhouse life looming ahead. Even the squads-east-and-west drill, which had seemed so tiresome even when I was doing my duty the strongest, oh, how glad I would be to do it now, day after day, and never crab once! And to be out with the company at retreat, with the band playing and the Colors flying, and then to join the yelling, crowding chow line, why, it seemed like I'd give anything now just to be sure of even the lowest place in the company, and I could stand all the

sneers they wanted to give me, if I didn't have to leave Company F for the guardhouse. But I'd never appreciated before what my company could mean to me, and it was too late now. Rainy-looking clouds were piling up this morning, and one drifted over the sun. It grew dark over the platoons on the drill-field. I sighed miserably and tramped on across the road and towards the officers' quarters.

From the corners of my eyes I could see Corporal Sumovski falling-in a relief on the grounds before the prison barracks. Sergeant Shevlin, my platoon sergeant, was watching from one side. He was big and slim and straight, and his uniform was one of the light-colored dressy kind that the National Guards had used before the war. His thumbs were stuck in his cartridge belt, which was almost snowy white. His campaign hat was cocked down over one eye, and a cigarette was cocked up toward it. Sergeant Shevlin had the name of being the snappiest duty-sergeant in the 2nd Battalion. I admired him as much as anybody did, even though he had been a bartender before the war, for he had treated me kindly three or four times. But when he looked over at me now, I hurried on. He yelled something or other about what in hell had I done with my scalp or scalps, and I thought, "Well, so he's going to start riding me now, too," and I tramped on towards the officers' quarters without looking back.

At last I was lifting my feet up three wooden steps, and then my hand was on the latch of a plain wooden door. Somewhere on the other side was First Lieutenant John Malin Hute, the senior lieutenant of the company, the chief of the Headquarters Platoon, and Johnny Hard

when the Company F men spoke of him in the barracks. And my knees certainly had a right to tremble as I got ready to go in and see Johnny Hard now.

He was the only officer in the company who was an experienced military man. Captain Cornwall had been a lawyer in Joliet, Illinois, before the war and had been assigned to the company from an officers' training-camp. So had Lieutenant Heppelwhite and Lieutenant Dill. Lieutenant Grange had been a battalion sergeant-major and Lieutenant Bucoda had been a first sergeant in one of the old Illinois National Guard regiments. They had soldiered on the Mexican border.

But Johnny Hard was an ex-Marine; he had been a gunnery sergeant for four years, and he wore an expert rifleman's badge and three ribbons where his blouse bulged out on the left side of his chest. When he quit the Marines, ten years back, he had knocked around over the West—and down in Mexico and South America, too, some said—working on the building of steel railroad bridges. Then he had settled down in Chicago, got to be some kind of a boss in the building iron-workers and had gone into politics. Not to run for office, but to be a helper for one of the big saloon politicians of the city. I had never quite got the straight of it, for back in Kansas a politician had to be an upstanding Christian citizen, and city saloon politics was spoken of as the creation of the Old Nick himself. But anyhow Johnny Hard seemed to have been strong in Chicago politics, and he had been made an officer when he joined the new National Guard regiment, and now he was the senior lieutenant of Company F.

He was a powerful husky of a man who looked like he'd been born in his uniform, leggins, and Sam Brown belt. He had shining black eyes that sort of bulged, like a

young Jersey bull's, when he was giving orders in his commanding tone of voice. His shoulders were square and wide, his neck was thick, and hard, tight muscles showed in ridges on his jaws. His blocky chin would usually get a frosty pink splotch on it when he was drilling the company, and the red would shine in his cheeks, and his black eyes would flash then, too. Captain Cornwall or nobody else had ever been able to make us snap into it like Johnny Hard could.

He was about as tall as I was, and back at Camp Mills I would always shiver when he reached me at inspection, and his black eyes would shoot such a hard look straight out under the brim of his campaign hat that it would seem to actually hammer on my eyes as I brought my rifle up to inspection arms. Crack! His hands would snatch the rifle as soon as I had jerked back the bolt, and my hands would drop down like two rocks. Then he would skim a look over the bolt and magazine, throw the stock up with a snappy twirl, squint through the bore for rust specks, flip the rifle back to a slant, and just throw it! My heart would about stop until I had caught the piece, closed the bolt, and brought it back to order arms. Then his look would jump all over me; and what a relief it always was when Johnny Hard had inspected and passed me, and had right-faced to step on to the next soldier!

He had been sent to the officers' school at Gondrecourt no sooner than we struck France and had just got back three days ago. And now I was to go in and face him, and be ripped up one side and down the other, and the Lord only knowed what charges he would put against me when he was done! I wished it was Captain Cornwall I had to report to, or almost anybody but the terrible

Johnny Hard. But it had to be. I fumbled and fumbled with the latch, heaved and sighed, and my stomach suddenly felt froze as I opened the door. But I had to go in.

The door opened into a small kind of setting-room which had a big heater in the middle, benches around it, and beyond was a table against the wall, and some chairs. Lieutenant Grange and another lieutenant were setting around with their legs crossed, smoking cigarettes and talking. Johnny Hard was standing with his back to the heater, his hands clasped behind him, while he rocked from his heels to his toes, and he was talking and laughing at a freckle-faced, red-headed lieutenant of engineers. This lieutenant appeared to be rather put out, for he was scowling at Johnny Hard, and biting on his lower lip, while he swung his right leg over the corner of the table, leaned his elbow on that leg, stuck his left fist on his hip, and listened.

"Yeah, I've had a bellyful of that guff about fifty times too often," Johnny Hard was saying. "I know it by heart. We're all over here for the same great cause. Let's all be like one big happy family. Leathernecks, love your gobs. Doughboys, love your Q. M. C. Let's all kiss and be sweet and drink chocolate in the Y. Why can't you ninety-day wonders get next to yourselves? The army's the old army, and a million of you guys can't change 'er."

"I'm trying to change nothing!" snapped the red-headed lieutenant. "I'm simply asking you to stop these brutal assaults on our men. You can argue until you're black in the face that these feuds and brawls between organizations are soldiering, and I won't be convinced. With three of our men, and one a sergeant, rendered unfit for duty in one evening——"

"A sergeant, my lad, who lets himself get rendered unfit for duty should be busted, and k. p. is wonderful for reckless privates. And now, as officer to officer——"

"And as gentleman to gentleman, I hope."

"Yeah, gentleman by act of Congress, beg your pardon, sir. Now, let me give it to you straight, my lad. It'd take a year to make my mob of boots into regular soldiers. But they've already got the first principle of soldierin', and that is a fightin' pride in their outfit. And I'm backin' 'em to a fare-thee-well. If any get hooked on a court martial offense, it's their hard luck. But I'm not tellin' 'em to let anybody walk on 'em. Far from it, my lad!"

"Fine, with the m. p.'s from your own regiment."

"A great officer, that A. P. M.," chuckled Johnny Hard.

"A border sergeant."

"Well," said the engineer lieutenant, standing up, and scowling more than ever. "Your military opinions are interesting, to say the least. You should give that roly-poly lieutenant of yours the benefit of them. He is still so childlike, for all of his association with hard-boiled veterans. The other evening I saw him with your company at retreat. He brought the men to parade rest when assembly sounded, and to present arms at the last note. There was an embarrassing wait until he brought them back to order arms. Evidently the little lieutenant has no ear for music. Some 'ninety-day wonder' might instruct him. Good day, lieutenant."

He made a fancy bow and I stepped to one side as he came towards the door.

"Dill?" said Johnny Hard to Lieutenant Grange.

"Yes."

"Hell, that *was* a hot one!"

Then he saw me.

"Well, what is it?"

"Sir, I—I was ordered to report to the lieutenant—Private Mattock, sir."

"Why didn't you make yourself known?"

I tried to say something, but I couldn't think of a word, and very likely I'd have choked on it if I had. I had a worse scare than ever when I figured out from the talk that it had to do with the rampage last night; and though I couldn't make out just what it was the two lieutenants had got so quarrelsome over, it seemed like Johnny Hard was standing up for Company F in the trouble we'd been having with the engineers, and I felt a hope that he might let me off easy; but when he said it was all right if anybody got hooked in a court martial then I was cast down in despair again, and now I felt miserable as ever.

"Come to my quarters," ordered Johnny Hard.

I followed him from the room and down an aisle which had officers' rooms on each side. At the fourth door Johnny Hard turned the knob and motioned me inside. It was a small place, with partitions that didn't reach to the roof, and it was rather crowded by a cot, a little table, a trunk, and a chair. Johnny Hard swung about, half sat on the table, folded his arms, and stared at me, with one side of his sharp mouth lifting in a kind of smile. I stood at attention just inside the door. My heart seemed to have stopped, but it felt like my stomach was rising up and sinking down, rising up and sinking down—then I got a shock when the lieutenant said the first thing that First Sergeant Novak had asked me:

"What the hell do you think you are, a whole damn army?"

Then shivers began to run up my back and turn to hot feelings behind my ears, and I went to stepping from one foot to the other, and I swallowed and swallowed, but I could not say a word.

"Well—stand at ease." The lieutenant stopped smiling, and his heavy eyebrows came together in a frown. "Now give me your story. I want it straight."

I tried to bring my wits together and tell him the story I'd figured out, one which my conscience told me was just about the truth. It was mighty hard to do, the way Johnny Hard was frowning at me, and I couldn't help but fluster and stammer over every word as I tried to tell how I'd met some soldiers from Company E; and when they found I had some money, they invited me to come along and meet some French friends of theirs; and when I found out that the friends were madamozels in an out-of-bounds place, I would have left at once, only the engineers piled in just then and started a battle, which I tried to get out of, but they cornered me up so's I couldn't run and——

"W-e-e-l-l, I'll be good——! Say! Do you think you're spielin' to a damn war baby? If you'd try to hand that line to a court martial, you'd get six years, and have it comin'!"

Johnny Hard unfolded his arms and made props of them, with each big, hairy hand flat on the table, and he tucked his chin down and stared like he was looking over specs, shaking his head at the same time. I shut my mouth and began to feel mad and sullen, for I had told him what was just the same as the truth, and he had only sneered at it, so now there didn't seem to be

any use of telling more about the battle. I felt absolutely sunk and hopeless.

"Now, listen," snapped Johnny Hard. "Try and get what I'm askin' you."

"Yes, sir," I mumbled.

"Before last night gangs of engineers had beaten up single Company F men four different times, hadn't they?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yeah. They're not arguin' on that point. It had got to be a habit. Last night they caught a single Company F man in an out-of-bounds joint and tackled it again."

"Sir," I said, "I tried to tell you—the lieutenant, I mean——"

"Holy hell! Where've you lived all your life?"

"Kansas, sir."

"Oh, *there!* Well, anyway, you've got to get something into your head. Now, listen to the story as I had it from the A. P. M. His m. p.'s up on the street heard screams from this alley joint. And exactly what they found was Private Parvin Mattock, Co. F, 185th Infantry, staggerin' around with a busted head, and three Camp 1 engineers laid out around him. They claimed they'd been ganged up on. Naturally they would. But no others were seen by the m. p.'s. And the A. P. M. is sure that this was the same gang that beat up the other Company F men, and that this time they found one who was too tough to handle. The madamozels declared to the gendarms that the infantryman ran into their place, with the engineers after him. And that, I guess is what actually happened. That is the story!"

I could only look down at my feet and feel all choked with sullen and bitter feelings as I realized that the

madamozels had laid everything on to me because they were all probably smitten on the infernal black Portuguesees, and that they had only been so friendly with me because I had such a big roll of francs. I was to get the blame for it all, and the court martial would only look on my true story as a lie, just as Johnny Hard did, so I might as well give up, admit anything, and be resigned to my punishment. There was simply no use in struggling any longer against my army troubles.

"Well, how about it?"

"Yes, sir," I mumbled, still gazing down at my toes. "That was how it happened, I guess, if the madamozels say so."

"Good enough. There's just one more thing. Where did the gang try to get you first? On that side street that leads to the hospital?"

I had been figuring so hard on my true story, and I had got so sullen and bitter when I realized no one would believe it, and it seemed like such a fool question the lieutenant had asked, that it simply racked my brains for a full minute. It was amazing. What in thunder? And then all of a sudden, without me figuring on it a particle, everything came to me as plain as day, and I realized that Johnny Hard's quarrel with the engineer officer, his remarks about the A. P. M., and his telling me what the story was—why it was all asked and said with the idea of hauling me out of this infernal muss! Well, I'd be blamed! Certainly, if the engineers ganged up on me out in the street, and I run down the alley to hide from them, and—and there I'd been so bullheaded honest that I wouldn't figure on or see anything but my true story, and couldn't understand it when Johnny Hard tried to show me how innocent I was!

"Yes, sir," I said, looking the lieutenant straight in the eye, "It was on that street, that's where it happened."

And I almost had to laugh, for it wasn't really a lie, as I wasn't saying *what* had happened; and I felt *so* blessed relieved when Johnny Hard grinned at me, scratched his bushy iron-gray head and sighed, "Phew!" I could begin to figure everything out now. Why, what he had said to the engineer officer about the soldiers having a fighting pride in their outfit—and I was a Company F man and had battled the engineers hard enough to lay three of them out, so he figured——

"Well!" Johnny Hard snapped to his feet. "If that's the story, there won't be any charges preferred. That's all. Get back to your quarters. Tell the first sergeant it's my orders to mark you light duty for the present. And keep your mouth shut about this interview. Use your head—and take it over on sick call every mornin'."

"Yes, sir," I said, and started to salute and about-face. Then I got the nerve to let Johnny Hard see that I'd figured out more than he might imagine. "Sir, I guess that engineer gang'll lay off old Company F now for a while."

"Jeezus!" said Johnny Hard. "You may be a soldier yet!"

I was a mighty proud and happy young soldier as I tramped back down the aisle and into the big barracks room. I could only think how gloriously fine everything looked now, for almost the first time since I'd been in the army. And what a fool I'd been to lay and think in such torment the night before, seeing myself as a guardhouse prisoner, and in shame and disgrace with my home folks, when I should have known by that time that there was more to the army than rules and regulations, and that nothing could happen to me for going out and battling for

my company. What a fool I'd been to be half-crazy scared this morning! Good old Company F! I was so free and uplifted in my pride that I completely forgot about the holt the Old Nick had on my soul.

The door opened, and Lieutenant Dill came in. The morning drill was over. I stepped back and stood at attention as the chubby lieutenant passed by. He gave me a cold glance from his pale gray eyes. His mouth had a fretful droop at the corners, and his pudgy face was red as a colicky baby's. Lieutenant Dill had probably got balled up in the drill this morning, like he very often did. He couldn't even look like an officer, with his stooped back, his bulgy stomach, and his thick legs. Besides, he had a squeaky voice that could never shout out a command, even when he would remember it right. The talk around the company was that he would never have got a commission if it hadn't been for his tremendous pull. For he was nobody else but Frank Lindon Dill, one of the most famous authors in the United States. Poor a hand for reading as I'd always been, I'd plowed through three of his exciting Western novels, and had read the most famous one, *Wyoming Lad*, twice. Ma had bought them herself, for Frank Lindon Dill's stories always had good morals to them, and she had declared time and again that they were about as good as sermons to teach a young man the way he should go. When I had written to her from Camp Mills that Frank Lindon Dill was one of my officers, she had replied that she wouldn't worry half so much about me now, knowing I was under the care of a man with the Christian ideals and morals of Frank Lindon Dill. But he had been quite a disappointment to me. He wasn't a particle like the heroes of his books. He was probably moral enough, but he was the

crankiest officer in the company, and he was so poor at drilling and commanding that the captain and Johnny Hard were forever riding him, and the soldiers got to calling him "Pickle" among themselves.

"Looky here, Dill!" I heard Johnny Hard snap, and I fooled at the door, so as to hear.

"Well, Hute?" squeaked the lieutenant.

"What's this about you havin' the company at retreat and bringin' it to parade rest at the sound of assembly?"

"A simple mistake. No lives were lost."

"Even the non-combatant officers are wise-crackin' about it."

"Let them. Even Bonaparte made mistakes. And I am only a common man doing my patriotic duty to the best of my humble ability."

"Which don't seem to include the humble knack for tellin' one bugle call from another."

"Hute, I wish you'd allow me to receive my reprimands from the captain."

"Dill, I wish you'd allow me the pleasure of kickin' you all up and down these quarters. For of all the damn war babies——"

I simply had to go out then, though Johnny Hard had just got warmed up to the point where the conversation was interesting. The quarrel between the two lieutenants, which had started back at Camp Mills, when Frank Lindon Dill was first assigned to the company, only touched my curiosity now. It would have seemed like the wildest idea imaginable if anybody had told me then how the quarrel was to run on until I was dragged into it myself. But a body never knows. You can be feeling free and high as a hawk in spring, with everything in your life turned fine and bright; and maybe you'll be looking down

curiously at the very thing that is to snare you into a miserable muss; but you never know, and it's a good thing, I guess, for everybody would be going out and jumping in the river if they could see ahead.

There was nothing for me to see now but the fact that my army troubles had all blowed away and that I had got to be a real hero for going out and battling for my company. It made me feel so sentimental and good I almost broke down and bawled when I hit the mess line at noon and about half the 1st Platoon piled around me, slapping me on the back, laughing, and yelling:

"Why the hell didn't you tell us you was Knockout Kansas?" "What you goin' to tackle next, the whole engineer regiment?" "Whyd'nt you let somebody else in on this bottle party of yours?" "Gawd, you musta mixed with a whole platoon, with that head and——" "Yeah, but look at his kisser! Jeez——" ". . . you're damn tootin' somebody had the guts to show them engineers a few——" ". . . that's the old Kansas Cyclone——" "What'd Johnny Hard let you know, old kid? Did——" "Don't fret about Johnny Hard. He'd lead the company against the whole damn camp if he took a notion. He won't stand for old Matt gettin' a court——"

And so they yelled and kidded around me; and even some from the other platoons were yelling down the chow line; and then it was I begun to realize that nobody was laughing and joshing at me, but that I was a regular hero in my company. But I wouldn't let myself get puffed up or swell-headed, so that I might forget what Johnny Hard had ordered about keeping my mouth shut; I just grinned and passed off the questions and acted as modest as I could. And after mess I went to my bunk, took down my rifle, and went to cleaning it unconcernedly, as though

nothing had happened the night before at all. But it was wonderful the way everybody had changed. Every so often somebody would yell something flattering at me, and everywhere I saw friendly, admiring looks. Even from Pete Widdy and Horse Karsak. But I ignored these two birds. It certainly was wonderful, this change.

Joe Beedy, who was on guard duty, came in and stood in front of my bunk, fiddling with his sidearms and acting like he wanted to say something, but didn't know how. I gave him a very friendly look, for I had tried to cotton up to Joe many the time. He was from Kansas City originally, and his folks were related to the Swamp Creek Beedys, whose place laid between the Nixons and the Bandons. It showed how the army would change you, but I had never felt above Joe because his relations were Swamp Creekers; instead I had tried to be friends with him because he was the only man in the company who knowed anything about my home country. Besides, he was a wonderful harmonizer. I looked up at him now and grinned, and a smile come over his bruised face, and his mournful eyes lighted up. He stuck out his hand, and I shook it.

"I'm proud to shake the hand of a soldier like you," he said earnestly. "I'm sorry I never knowed the kind of a guy you was before. It's your kind that makes a company one you like to soldier in. I was goin' to put in for a transfer, but I won't do it now. Good old company F. She'll be a fine outfit as long as she has soldiers with the guts to go out and battle for her."

Well, I blushed all over to hear his praises, and I tried to tell him I hadn't done so much. But it was no use. I never could have explained how it had happened. I'd told my story to Johnny Hard, and I was bound to stick to it

on his account. I just about worshiped him, as I thought of how he had hauled me out of such a terrible muss.

So I set there and just grinned and blushed at the praises of Joe Beedy and the others, while I polished the bolt and butt plate of my rifle, cleaned the magazine, and ran an oily rag, and then a dry rag, about a dozen times through the bore; and then I went to polishing the stock with some linseed oil I'd brought across in my barracks bag.

I'd been lucky in getting this Springfield, as it was a star-gauge, without a pit in its bore, and its stock was a rich dark color, almost black, with a beautiful curly grain. I almost forgot my sore head and ribs and the hero I was as I rubbed the linseed into the stock and polished it down. Soon it shone like streaky black glass, and it felt slick and hard as glass under my fingers.

"Say, old kid, that's a noble Springfield you got. Star-gauge, too. Let's take a look at 'er."

And Joe Beedy reached for my rifle. He had never paid any attention to it before, but now he threwed it up and squinted through the bore, whirled it back to his shoulder and pulled down over the battle sight. Then he admired the stock and bragged on it to Horse Karsak.

Horse turned it over and over in his hands, and then he declared it was the handsomest stock in the platoon. Mike Neff argued for his own Springfield, but anybody could see that mine was the finest when the two pieces were compared together, for the grain of his stock was coarser and straighter. Corporal Sumovski matched his star-gauge with mine, then; and its stock did put up something of an argument, but there were three little pits in his Springfield's bore.

"Come on, you 3rd Relief!" ordered Corporal Pinkey

Funke, tramping down the aisle, with his cartridge belt bowed down under his fat stomach.

"Back to the guardhouse with the rest of you birds, too," called Sergeant Shevlin from the door. "Double time. We got to take the prisoners to mess."

"Take 'er easy, old kid," said Joe Beedy to me, as he joined the gangs crowding for the door.

When the guards were out, Sergeant Shevlin walked up to my bunk, and stood there looking down at me as friendly as a sergeant could at a private, and then he said, "Good business. How's the old head?"

"Pretty sore, sergeant, but I guess I can stand it."

"Yeah, you'll be all right. And now let me give you a tip. You know that big red-faced Mick who is on the prisoner-chaser detail? Well, he had five workin' out on the dump the other day, and one of 'em wouldn't snap into it, and the Mick stuck his bayonet into the mud, spit on his hands, and knocked this bird for a row with one wallop. The camp commander was up the line, and saw it. 'Find out what company that Mick's from and have his captain make him a corporal,' the general ordered his adjutant. Take my tip, and borrow Campanero's drill book. Gimme a cigarette."

That was the finest surprise of all, to have my platoon sergeant hint that I might get to be a corporal now, if I was to study the drill book, and then to have him be so friendly as to ask me for a cigarette, and I could have sworn because I didn't have any.

"I'm all out of them, sergeant," I said. "I honestly am."

"That's all right. Have one of mine, then."

He flipped a Camel at me, swung away, yelled a "Hello, there!" from the door at somebody, and stood for a minute, with his hands stuck inside his belt; then the

two platoons marched away for the drill field, and the sergeant was gone, and I was alone.

I dug my ox-blood shoe polish from under the head of my blankets and shined my rifle sling for a little bit; then I began to notice that I was feeling pretty tired, so I shoved the field cleaner and the tube of gun oil back into the butt plate, hung up my rifle, shoved the other stuff under the blankets, and laid down to get some peace and rest from the excitement I'd gone through.

My head was throbbing again, and I felt miserably achy all over, but I didn't seem to mind. It was amazing and wonderful the way everything had turned to drive off my army troubles and make me a hero in my company. A hero—I actually was. I had never been a hero in all my life before, and I had never even hoped to be one. But it certainly was glorious to be looked up to and admired. Joe Beedy had acted like he might become a real friend to me now, and I had never had a real friend before, either. And Sergeant Shevlin had hinted that I might get to be a corporal. But I wasn't sure that I wanted to. Being a hero in my company seemed a whole lot better than any corporal's stripes right now.

If everything only was to go all right—if the A. P. M. didn't prefer charges—and, say, I'd have to get after Gregorio and warn him to keep his mouth shut; for if a court martial should come, there was no use of him getting in the guardhouse, too. But he hadn't said anything yet, and he probably wouldn't.

The commands were sounding from the drill-field in rousing shouts. Johnny Hard had the company. Good old Company F.

I would be soldiering fine now, with no more real army troubles to worry about until we started for the front.

I went to roll over on my side, and then I saw the cigarette Sergeant Shevlin had flipped at me.

I picked it up and rolled it between my fingers. And then the thought come to me: If I was to go on being a hero in my company, wouldn't I have to smoke, drink, curse, gamble, and perform with the madamozels, like all the other popular soldiers? I certainly would. I could see no way out.

And yet, wouldn't that be yielding to the Old Nick? Wouldn't it mean that I had taken the bright and flowery road of sin for good and all? And in the end wouldn't that bring more sorrow to my old folks than the shame and disgrace of me being a guardhouse prisoner?

It might—it certainly would—I knew it well. But I couldn't rassel the Old Nick down now. His holt was too strong. I had yielded too far. It was terrible to think that my soul was lost, but it couldn't be helped.

I reached over and got a match from Doc Makin's bunk, and lit the cigarette.

V

FROG SUNDAY



It was in the afternoon of the first Sunday of June. I was setting at a table in the enlisted men's Y. M. C. A., trying to answer the home letters that had come on the very same day we got the news of the Battle of Cantigny. It was the first day of rest I'd had since the regiment moved to the little Frog town of Houel, in the Touraine country, for intensive training. I'd been stretched out in the grass the biggest part of the afternoon, snoozing my head off, and I still felt like doing it. But I simply had to write some good letters to my folks and Elsie.

I stretched and yawned and felt absolutely doless. This month of drilling and hiking had been the hardest and steadiest work I had ever done in my life. Ten hours a day of it, six days a week; and on the first three Sundays we'd been marched out to build trench works, and rifle, trench-mortar, and one-pounder target ranges. The last month of guard duty had been bad enough, with two platoons left to do the camp guard, and ours and the 2nd sent five miles above Bordaie to guard railroad yards and the construction work on a mile of warehouses. About the only thing that had happened to me out there was when I was on guard in the yards and saw a wine tank car get a bump that sprung a leak in it. When I was relieved, I told Joe Beedy and Doc Makin about it, and we swiped three buckets from the company kitchen,

and I sprung the leak with my bayonet until the buckets were filled. It was a very strong wine called madear, and the whole platoon got drunk. That hurt my chances to be a corporal, but it had made me a bigger hero than ever in my company.

But it had been mostly day after day of guard duty, and here in Houel it had been mostly drill and hike, drill and hike all week, and dig trenches on Sundays. That was the way it was now all through the Service of Supply. Down at the base ports the nigger stevedores worked night and day to unload the ships and get them started back as soon as they could. The engineer regiments and the labor battalions were working eight-hour days, and standing formations and inspections besides. The railroad engineer regiments didn't know any such things as union rules and hours. The truck-drivers and mechanics of the supply trains were driving and repairing at all hours of the days and nights. Even the soldiers in the Medical and the Quartermaster Corps, who were supposed to have the softest jobs in the S. O. S. were on duty at all kinds of hours. As for the combat outfits which were training behind the lines, they all drilled and worked just as hard as our 185th Regiment did. The Americans certainly made the slow-moving Frogs open their eyes in every base port, supply depot and headquarters town on the railroads which made a kind of backbone through the Service of Supply.

I had never fell into any more army troubles, but the hard life had got to seeming awful drudgery to me, and I was enjoying this day of rest as much as I ever had a Sunday in all my life. I yawned and stretched some more and tried to think of something to write that would get by the censor. I'd have to be careful, too, not to write any-

thing that would make the home folks think I might have changed from the Christian Kansas young man they used to know. I chewed on my pencil and gazed up at a little poem that was framed like a motto and hanging on the wall. It said:

Lift up the red triangle
Against the things that maim!
It keeps off booze, the wrecker!
It shuts the house of shame!

Well, the Y. M. C. A. had never helped me much when I was trying to be a Christian American soldier; but it was a good place to write letters in, and I knew it eased Ma's worries a lot. She believed that so long as I was under the influence of the Y. M. C. A. and Frank Lindon Dill together, I was perfectly safe, far as my morals were concerned. And I wouldn't for the world have told her any different.

I read the home letters over again, and buckled down and thought my best. The writing was going to be a hard chore. I was by an open window, and I could look out and see the green oaks of the little Houel park, with great splotches of tramped dirt among the shady grass. Beyond the park was a road, and beyond the road was a mossy cemetery-wall. There was a grass slope from the road to the wall, and there were bushes along with white and yellow roses. It was all mighty pretty to see. The breeze that blowed from the shady trees was cool and it tickled my face and hair pleasantly. I set and drowsed, and tried to think of something to write, but it was hard to keep my mind away from the pretty sight and the pleasant weather. Early June weather is about the same everywhere, I

guess, whether it's in Kansas or France, and you always like to rest and enjoy it.

But I forced myself to think of the home folks. I had to get the letters out of the way right now. For the afternoon had seemed to just drift away; it was after four o'clock already; and in a couple of hours Madam Odile would have a fine supper fixed for me and Joe Beedy. So I buckled down.

Dear old Ma. So she was sure, was she, that I was spending all my time in the Y. M. C. A. and not gallivanting? She knowed she could trust her own only big old boy, with the bringing-up she'd give him. And she knowed he'd be glad to hear of all the work the Clevisburg church people, Elsie Snodgrass, especially, were doing for the Clevisburg boys. Well, it was interesting enough; but, oh, lordy, it all seemed like a far-off dream; and I wondered if Ma ever realized how my army life was so much like work, and how I would come in from my ten hours of drilling and hiking all tired, sweaty, dirty, and half-starved, just like I'd been harvesting. No, she had just made a dream about her boy in the army. And it was strange and peculiar, but it seemed like I couldn't let myself write what I was really thinking and feeling, any more than the censor would let me write what I was doing.

I tried to think of good old Pa and get some inspiration from his letter. He'd been cultivating corn the day before he wrote. It was coming along good now, as there had been a wonderful rain in the last week. It had brought the wheat on, too. The government had organized a corporation to keep wheat at \$2.20 a bushel during the war. It was what he could have expected from a Democrat President. But it wasn't healthy to kick. Still, wheat would certainly have gone to \$3.00 or more if the government

had let it alone. 'Peared like they could have let the farmers get something, when the city profiteers were hogging millions. Pearl Jenkins was doing fair as the hired help, even if he was a Swamp Creeker. The timothy and clover were looking good, but he expected to pay like sixty for hands in both the haying and the wheat harvest. The price of everything had gone up out of sight, but he hoped to clear enough to afford the thousand-dollar Holstein bull calf he'd set his mind on. He still figured a pure-bred dairy herd was the farmer's only salvation. Well, that was all the news; and he hoped I was getting along fine, and look out for myself; and he expected I needed quite a few extra things, so he was going to send me \$25.00 through the Red Cross.

Pa's letters could make me homesicker than anything else; for, while they were simple and plain, they would somehow make me see the wide old rambly red barn, with the black and white cows stringing out from their stanchions, and on into the blue-grass pasture; ambling through the gate which Pa held open for them, switching their tails, throwing their muzzles around to lick their shoulders, their fine big udders swinging as they ambled on. Or, I'd see a rackload of timothy in front of the barn, and a forkful of it histing straight up, and then skidding back into the dark mow. Or I'd see the big old Percherons, Harve and Dave, tramping in their jingly harness to the water trough, and the riding cultivator standing in the apple orchard at the edge of the field of wavy young corn. Just home.

Well, I simply had to start in writing. Other 185th men were at it, bending over the tables, some of them chewing gum, and all frowning hard as they scrawled over the letter paper. At the counter the Y. M. C. A. man

was selling cigarettes, chocolate, and gum, and giving a friendly smile with each package. Miss Pilsner-Orting, the Y. M. C. A. girl, was there, too, but she was too busy talking to Lieutenant Dill to mind the enlisted men. She had her elbows on the counter, her hands clasped under her chin, and she certainly was admiring our little lieutenant. He was leaning on his left elbow, looking down over his shoulder, and waving his right hand as he talked. He was probably telling her what a famous author he was. He didn't have any business to be in the soldiers' Y. M. C. A., but he was there, anyhow, and the soldiers had to just stand back and listen. Well, I could admire Lieutenant Dill a lot myself, as far as him being a famous author was concerned, for here I was, hardly able to write a letter to my folks.

But finally I got myself buckled down for good, and I stopped myself from looking at anything but my stationery, and sweat this letter out:

Dear Folks:

Well, bless your old hearts, here I am, fat and ornery as ever. I got your letters yesterday.

I still can't tell you where I am or what I'm doing, but I'm all right. So don't worry about your boy.

The June weather here is a lot like Kansas, only the nights ain't so hot. It is real cool and pleasant today.

We have lots to eat in the company, and I am fat as ever. The weather has been mild most of the time lately, though we have had a few hot days.

It is certainly fine, Ma, about the socks and scarfs the Ladies' Aid is knitting for the Red Cross. And I was glad to hear that Elsie is making such wonderful talks for the Red Cross and Y. M. C. A. drives. Elsie is a wonderful intelligent girl and as good as gold. What is her cousin Lola doing? You mustn't worry Ma, about the Y. M. C. A. selling cigarettes to

the soldiers. If they get to smoking too many, the officers will know when to stop it.

Did I ever tell you how the French people dress, Ma? They all wear wooden shoes, and the men wear a kind of short black Mother Hubbard over their shirts and britches. So do the boys. The women dress about like you do, except for the wooden shoes. Hardly any of them can talk American, and they have a hard time understanding what you mean, even when you yell your loudest. They farm and keep stores, just like the Americans, and they are great for drinking wine, having a café on every corner——

I censored that part myself; I didn't want to say anything to the old folks about cafés and buvettes, come to think of it; for that would be sure to set them worrying. So I rubbed it out and wrote on:

——they are great for churches, having a fine big one, even in the smallest town. But all the churches are Romish. I don't believe there's a Methodist or Baptist church in France. Don't you worry now, Ma, about that. I haven't set foot in one of the Romish churches, and don't expect to. The minister of our regiment is a Chicago Methodist, and an amazing fine exhorter.

Speaking of churches, I guess all the Snodgrasses is same as ever. And how is Lola Bandon? Write me all about the Bells and everybody else in old Clevisburg.

I certainly liked your letter, Pa, about the farm. I hope you can get plenty of good help, and don't work too hard. Yes, I could use \$25.00 very good.

Well, Pa and Ma, I have lots to do, and I've described all about the French people, so I'll quit for this time.

Don't worry about me. I'm getting along fine and have never had a bit of trouble.

Love from your son

PVT. PARVIN MATTOCK,

Co. F. 185th Inf., A. E. F.

I was proud of that letter, as it was as good and clever as one as I had ever wrote, and it was pretty certain to get by the censor. I doubted if Frank Lindon Dill himself could have done better. But now I had to turn out something for Elsie, and do it quick, too, as the time was getting late.

Dear Elsie:

Well, how's the world using you? I'm still fat and ornery as ever. I still can't tell where I am or what I'm doing, but I'm getting along fine, so don't worry, Elsie.

You'll be surprised, Elsie, to know the June weather here is about like Kansas, only the nights are cool.

I certainly did enjoy yours and your pa's letters. I could write some long letters back if it wasn't for the censor. But I can't say much, way it is. I have some very good times, Elsie, in the Y. M. C. A. There is a hut everywhere you go in France, with rooms where you can set and write letters and read the magazines, and see a movie when they have one, or listen to a lecture or a sermon, and a gymnasium where you can take exercises. Only we don't have a lot of time and are usually too tired. They also sell candy, chewing gum, and French soda water, which would make it seem like the old confectionery in Clevisburg, Elsie, if there was only a nice girl like you to drink some soda water with me.

How is Mrs. Snodgrass and Steve and everybody?

I expect that kid of a cousin of yours still plays the piano and is as full of mischief as ever she was. Did she graduate all right? You might tell her again I'm expecting her to write me a letter. I'm away over here in France, fighting for America's great cause, and I like to get lots of big long letters from everybody, even if I can't answer them good on account of the censor. I have always felt like a big old brother about that kid of a cousin of yours, Elsie. So you tell her not to be bashful, but to write, and maybe I'll send her some souvenir handkerchiefs. Tell her that I sing her song every once in a

while, and not to forget her big old brother Parvin. You folks have always been as good as gold to Lola, and I want to be, too, but I won't if she don't write me long letters. Ha. Ha.

Well, Elsie, I've told you about everything I can. I was really only joking about Lola's letters, as a hint for all you folks to write big long ones. Now don't any of you forget.

I think your war work is fine.

Well, aw revor, as the French people say.

From your affectionate friend,

PVT. PARVIN MATTOCK,

Co. F, 185th Inf., A. E. F.

I heaved a big sigh when I was done, for it had been a bigger chore than anybody would think, to write that letter. But I felt like I had finished it in pretty good style. I really had been bothered quite a bit whenever I would think about that kid, Lola, and I had wondered very often why she didn't write, and why nobody mentioned her in their letters. I did want to hear from Lola, and I felt like I had fixed it real good so that she would take the hint.

But now I had to get along to my billet, where Joe Beedy would be waiting for me. The way to it led through the Houel town square. Houel was a town about the size of Clevisburg; and here around the square was a bank, a post office, a jewelry store, a three-story hotel, dry-goods, grocery, and drug stores, two barber shops, and cafés and buvettes galore. The buildings all had stone or plaster walls and tile roofs, shabby looking and old; and the doors and other woodwork looked like there hadn't been a gallon of paint sold in the town for five years. There was a two-story town hall in the center of the square. On a Friday all kinds of peddlers would drive into the town and set up a market around the town hall. I had never

got to see the market day except in the evening, but even then it would be like a fair; with the farm women gossiping in bunches and driving bargains with the peddlers; and the farmers setting around in the cafés talking, probably about crops, and the bankers, politicians, and grain speculators, just like our farmers would at home. Only here they would drink wine and seem to have a real jolly time out of arguing over the farm problem.

Side streets ran every which way from the square; and there were cafés on all of them, and also the smaller businesses of the town. On one was a blacksmith shop, on another, and next to our orderly room, was the town bakery, and on another was a cobbler's shop, and a place where wooden shoes were hewed out of alder logs.

Over west of the park was a sawmill, and a good enough one, I guess, as I had never seen a sawmill in Kansas and couldn't judge it. This sawmill belonged to a young fellow who was a sergeant in the Frog army, and who had won their war cross and military medal for killing Boches. Madam Odile and the other town people called him "Black Jean." It seemed that he was a fierce husky of a man, with wild eyes and great coaly mustaches, and that he would fight at the drop of a hat. He was the cousin of the old Buson who ran the town bakery, and he was engaged to Junie Tadousac, who lived with her ma in a good house at the back of a big walled yard. At the right front corner of this yard was Company F's orderly room, in a building where Junie's pa had used to run a store. Back of this building ran the stone wall that separated the Tadousac place from the bakery back-yard. It was over that wall that Black Jean had first started courting the brown-eyed, yellow-curled Junie. Madam Odile and the other neighbors around were mighty proud of

Black Jean and took a hearty interest in the love affair.

On the road that ran east from the square was the cannery, the biggest thing the town had. It was an old two-story, prison-looking building of stone, with a corrugated-iron roof. The country around Houel was fine for asparagus, and that was the main thing the cannery put up. It wasn't running much this summer, and hadn't been all through the war. Our regiment used its boiler room for a bathhouse. The cannery owners had a fine chatoe on out in the country, but only the woman and her daughter lived in it. The man was a captain in the Frog army, and was off fighting at the front.

I hiked along faster when I looked at my watch and saw it was close to six o'clock. The square and the streets were streaked brown with soldiers walking along and around, and I knew many to speak to as I passed them by. Some officers came up to the hotel as I was passing it, and I saluted snappily, without hardly having to think. I had growed right into the soldier's life.

When I dropped my letters in the mail box, I looked in through the front window of the orderly room. Johnny Hard was inside, standing back a ways from a window that went clear to the floor and would open like a door. He was gazing out at Junie Tadousac, who was carrying a pail of water from the well to her house. She was worth gazing at, there was no doubt about it. Though she was leaning to one side from the weight of the water pail, she just seemed to sway and glide along. She was wearing a bright blue dress, and there were neat leather shoes on her little feet. Her white, round arms and neck shone in the sunlight, and it made a dazzle in her yellow curls. And the way she walked nobody could help noticing that Junie Tadousac had more curves than a pretzel, as

Sergeant Shevlin had remarked when he first saw her. And she certainly knowed it, too. According to some of the gossip that was talked around among both the Frogs and the soldiers, if her ma wasn't so strict with her, and if the Busons didn't keep a watch on her all the time, too, this Black Jean wouldn't have any feeansay when he come home on a furlough this summer.

Junie stopped for a second in the door of her kitchen, glanced back over her shoulder, shook her yellow curls, and disappeared from sight. Johnny Hard's chest heaved, he started to turn, and I ducked away.

"Joe," I said, when I had clumb into our billet, "I honestly believe Johnny Hard *is* smitten on that Tadousac madamozel."

"Maybe so," said Joe. "But it's a damn good thing for a guy to keep his trap shut about. There's a lot of army politics bein' played in this outfit, and hell's goin' to pop one of these days. Me, I figger on keepin' altogether out of it. As a rule, takin' things as they go, I gener'ly find I have troubles enough of my own to look after."

"You said it, Joe," I agreed heartily. "That's me too."

"Yeah. Well, all I'm thinkin' of now is when do we eat. I swear I can smell Odile's eggs a-cookin'."

Madam Odile was really Joe's girl, only she wasn't a girl, of course. She must have been thirty-six, or maybe thirty-nine, if she was a day, and was too overly plump to be called pretty. But she was black-haired, black-eyed, and very jolly, and she would have looked very handsome when she laughed, only she didn't take good care of her teeth. Odile called herself a widow, but she wasn't sure. Her husband had been listed as missing for two years, but she was afraid he might be a prisoner with the Boches. She had a good-sized house, just across the street from the

big open barnyard where the Company F kitchen and mine and Joe's billet was. Behind it was a fine garden patch and one of the biggest, oldest, and spreadingest apple trees I had ever seen. The house was old, and, like most of the Frog houses, it had very few windows and was dark inside. But it was comfortable furnished, and back of the kitchen was a fine place for eating. A tile floor ran out into the yard for a ways, and an L that was used for a smokehouse and storeroom and stuck out from the middle of the house shaded the kitchen yard from the sun in the afternoons and evenings.

With three thousand soldiers and officers in this little town, and with most of the madamozels kept at home with their mothers like Junie Tadousac was, it was pretty hard for anybody to have one all to himself, unless he was an officer. Under the circumstances, Joe Beedy was mighty lucky, and I appreciated being his bunkie and getting to eat one of Odile's fine suppers with him. And I tried not to feel envious when Madam Odile would plump herself on Joe's lap, put her big, white arm around his neck, and call him "peteet garson." She called me "peteet papa," but it didn't mean anything so long as Joe was around, and I had sense enough to know it.

But I forgot to be envious and everything else but hungry when I set down to the supper Madam Odile had fixed for us. She had put the table on the tiles just outside the kitchen door. The rows of lettuce, cabbage, and potatoes ran right up to the tiles. Out a ways the apple tree waved its old boughs, green leaves, and young fruit as the evening breeze freshened. The tablecloth was red and white checked, like Ma had often used at home. The dishes were fine white ones, with scrawly blue figures around the sides of the bowls and the rims of the plates.

We each had a bottle of Bordeaux, an extra good kind of vin roosh. I could smell eggs a cooking in butter. Madam Odile, wearing a crinkly black dress, with white starched stuff on the neck and sleeves, and her jolly face simply shining in a wide smile, stepped out of the kitchen, a bowl of soup in each hand.

"Potage pour voo, peteet garson!" she laughed, as she set the bowl of soup in front of Joe. And "Potage pour voo, peteet papa"—as she gave me a bowl of soup that was thick with vegetables and was soaking over a thick slice of the rich brown Frog bread. Its smelly steam made my eyes water and my mouth dribble, and I simply poured the soup down; and it was so flavory and rich that then I was hungrier than ever, especially after I'd downed a glass of the Bordeaux wine. Joe and I leaned back and sighed together.

"Alley hoop, madam, alley hoop!" he sung out.

"Toot sweet, peteet garson!" she sung back from the kitchen.

Joe'd told her to make it snappy, and she'd said she would; but we knowed she wouldn't, of course; so we just leaned back, supped some more Bordeaux, licked our lips, and waited. That was the only trouble with Madam Odile's meals; she was like all the Frogs, and while they do cook wonderfully well, they haven't any sense at all about how to really enjoy eating. They like to fetch out one dish at a time, eat it, and then set and sup wine, and gab away for a quarter of an hour, before they fetch another one. Joe had really had to get hard-boiled with Odile before he could make her agree to bring our eggs or meat, potatoes, salad, and vegetables all out at once, so that we could eat civilized. But she had finally learned

to do it; and when she come now, everything was on one big tray.

The main dish was a dozen-egg omelet, the like of which I never ate before or since. It was like a beautiful picture, the way Madam Odile had made it, with toasty splashes of brown all over its plump shape, with streaks of gold color among the splashes, with trickles of white around, and all of it shining and bubbling from the sweet butter she'd cooked it in, and spicy garlic smells in its steam. Just a rich section of that omelet in my white, blue-bordered plate, with some brown crusty slivers of fried potatoes that made me know it was a lie when they called them "French-fried potatoes" in American restaurants, some creamy asparagus tips kind of peppered, and a lettuce salad with an oil on it that made me want to never think of vinegared lettuce again—just forkfuls of all that melting in my mouth as I softly chewed, and oozing down my throat, with a bite of French bread and sweet butter and a dash of Bordeaux wine following each wonderful swallow, while the blue and white dishes and the red wine in the bottles shone around on the clean, checked tablecloth, and the cool breeze waved the green leaves and fruit of the apple tree—just all that—well, it was simply heaven itself on a Sunday evening after a week of such hard drilling and hiking as Joe and I had known, and after the messes of army chow.

And did Joe Beedy and I stop to talk, laugh, argue, and crack jokes in the Frog style while we were having this fine eating? I should say not! We ate like we knowed how to enjoy a good meal when we had one, and only chewed, swallowed, and sighed, never saying a word. Madam Odile never said a word, neither, but just stood and

watched, with her hands on her hips, and that jolly smile on her plump red face. We was all done in half an hour, but what a beautiful thirty minutes it had been! When we had supped the last of our quarts of wine, we leaned back and puffed on cigarettes, while Madam Odile cleaned up the table.

"Oh, boy!" sighed Joe. "If all of war was only like this!"

"It'd be some war, old kid," I sighed back.

"We'll remember this many the time when we get to the front," said Joe.

"I guess we will. Wonder when we'll go."

"Soon enough. Don't worry."

"Don't you really want to go and get at the cowardly Boches, Joe?"

"I ain't crazy about it, long as I'm so comfortable with Odile. I admit I ain't no fightin' fool like you are, old kid."

Somehow I had used to feel plagued when he would talk about me that way, but I had begun to get over it. I said now, "It's simply in my blood. I can't help it, and I don't take any credit for it, Joe."

"I used to think it was in mine, too," sighed Joe. "But I've had so much trouble in my life I ain't crazy any more to go lookin' for it. You don't know what trouble is, old kid."

The sunlight was getting red, and the shadows were deepening around, and Joe's voice got solemncholy with the shadows. As he leaned back and puffed up smoke and gazed through it, his eyes looked mournfuler than ever. I thought maybe he was going to tell me about his trouble at home, in Kansas City. I broke in with some fool remark or other about Swamp Creek and the Swamp Creek

Beedys, but he shied away from talking about them, like he always did, for some reason which I could never fathom.

"Always trouble," sighed Joe. "Never very many times so good and peaceful as this. And I've a feelin' we won't last long here. The Americans is out and givin' 'em guts along the lines at last. And soon we'll be marchin' out, out and away to the front, where it'll be trouble for me again. I know. Good times in your hand; puff! trouble blows 'em out and you're back in the dark. That's the way she goes, old kid. It's the front, and then——"

"Le front? Non, non, peteet garson! Restay esee, tray content."

It was Madam Odile. She had finished the dishes and had come out in time to hear Joe talking mournfully about the front; and now she set by him on the bench, put her plump arm around his neck, stroked his hair, and said again, "Restay content."

Joe gave her a hug and laughed: "Don't fret, madam. I'll restay content esee long as I can, believe me. You're a good old gal, tray bon pour soldat, savvy voo. I'd restay esee till the war was over if I could. Restay esee fini la gear, savvy voo, madam?"

I leaned back and smoked another cigarette, enjoying the warm, comfortable feeling of the omelet and wine inside, keeping quiet, and not bothering Odile and Joe. The shadows got deeper, and twilight began to come on, so then I paid Madam Odile ten francs for my part of the supper, and left her and Joe alone. They both sang out a "Bon swear!" as I went around a corner of the kitchen; and as I tramped away I envied Joe a lot, and I thought I wouldn't be crazy to go away to the front either, if I was in his shoes.

I was feeling drowsy from the wine and the filling supper, so I clumb up to my billet and laid on my blankets for a restful nap. I dozed and drowsed away peacefully for a good hour, then I was roused by a couple of soldiers coming up the ladder and trying to harmonize an old song called "Alexander's Ragtime Band," but they were too stewed to any more than make a noise. My mouth tasted dry, and I felt sort of blue, and as it was half an hour until tattoo, I decided to ramble over to the Red Bull café and find some company and have a glass of vin roosh.

In the back room of the Red Bull Madam Rose had two coal-oil lamps burning bright, the red wine in the glasses shone, and it was a jolly gang around the long table. Sergeant Mahler, the left guide of our 1st Platoon, was looking solemn and solid as ever. But First Sergeant Novak had his tough grin, and Corporal Funke, Horse Karsak, Pete Widdy, and eight or ten more were all roaring and laughing over a story that Sergeant Shevlin was telling on Doc Makin, who was listening with a sour look on his usual sunny face.

Doc had been a chiropractor in Niles, Michigan, before the war. He had been drafted as a common soldier, because the doctor officers had to be regular drug men. When the doctor officers had tried to vaccinate him against smallpox and give him shots in the arm against typhoid fever, he had argued that he or any other chiropractor didn't believe in it. But the doctor officer had only laughed, "Is that so? Well! Glad to meet you, doc!" And Doc declared that the doctor officer then gave him an extra jab with the needle, and it made him so sick he had to go to the hospital. When he got well, he had been shipped to Camp Mills as an infantry private. Doc Makin

was all sunshine and smiles naturally, he was a wonderful banjo-picker and harmonizer, and finally he had come through his army troubles as well as I did. But I could see he wasn't appreciating Sergeant Shevlin's story.

"Yeah," Sergeant Shevlin was saying, "it was lucky for Doc I came along when the lieutenant had come to that part of his spiel. Gang, I'm tellin' you, Doc's neck was swellin' like a bulldog's when he hears the meeyaw of an alley tomcat. Hey, Madam Rose! Un alumet pourma cigarette, seel voo play. Yeah. Well, the leftenant was rollin' it off in about this grand style: 'Ah, Miss Pilsner-Orting—Lardner! Do not speak of Lardner, I beg you! If I have one prejudice, it is Lardner, Miss Pilsner-Orting! He is the rankest sample of the birds that's raisin' hell with American literchoor, rehllly. His work is only vulgarity for the Bulgarians. Imagine, now, the cowboy hero of my *Wyoming Lad* presented as a Jack Keefe! I tell you such a man slaps the face of our best traditions. I assert, Miss Pilsner-Orting, that Lardner has never created an American hero or sprouted an American ideal; he only writes up low guys in a low lingo and he ain't got no tekneek!' Well, gang, it was at that time I noticed Doc's face all afire and his neck swellin' to the limit. I saw he was ready to leap, and I strong-armed him. 'What the hell do you know about Lardner?' I says. 'You was never on the Sox.' 'Lardner's from my home town,' snarls Doc, 'and nobody can knock nobody from my home town while I'm around! Sergeant, let me to him!' Bugs, I'll say. I hauled him out. And I'm tellin' him he'd better stick to his banjo and leave literchoor alone, especially when it's a matter of arguin' it with a lieutenant. Give me a light, somebody."

"It wasn't literchoor at all!" Doc actually yelled, and

banged the table with his fist. "Can't nobody understand he was castin' slurs on a famous man from my *home town*? From good old Niles, Michigan! *That's* the argument, and I claim I got a right——"

"Never mind. Johnny Hard'll get even for you, Doc!" said someone down the table a ways.

"Forget that toot sweet!" snapped Sergeant Shevlin turning serious just that quick and his gray eyes looking steely as he shot a glance over at Madam Rose.

For a minute the room was quiet and uncomfortable, as we all knowed that Sergeant Shevlin was next to a lot of stuff that the rest of us didn't know. He could simply jabber the Frog talk, and, besides, Fabienne Buson was sweet on him, so he heard all the Frog gossip. And there was plenty of it about Johnny Hard, Junie Tadousac, and Madam Rose. Joe and I had understood that much from Odile, who was Madam Rose's friend. And the quarrel between the two lieutenants was bad as ever. But officers' troubles were a good thing for soldiers to keep quiet about.

Sergeant Shevlin turned everything into the way of a jolly good humor again, by rearing back, grinning all around, and starting us to harmonizing on "Bon Swear, ma Cherry, Comment Tally Voo"; and we harmonized away at it and some other good songs, and clinked our glasses, supped vin roosh, and hollered and laughed until tattoo blowed.

So I was feeling very cheerful and bright as I rolled into my blankets and laid there thinking drowsily for a few minutes, while the thirty other soldiers in our barn-loft billet shuffled and bumped around and gabbed back and forth, as they undressed and settled themselves in their straw ticks.

Thinking back over it, this seemed to be about the best all-around Sunday I had ever knowed. Everything had gone fine, from the cleaning-up, loafing, and letter-writing to the supper at Odile's and the harmonizing in the Red Bull. Tomorrow it would be drill and hike again. And so on for months. We needed a pile of training. And then, maybe, sometime, the front. Yeah, the front—I shut my eyes and drowsed away.

I felt a sneaking envy for Joe Beedy, when he stumbled over me coming up to bed at I don't know what time. But only for a minute. I said to myself I couldn't expect to have all the luck. And then I went off peacefully to sleep for the second time.

VI

SOLDIERING RIGHT



OMPANY F was on the rocky road to the drill-field. It was a three-mile hike from Houel. All of the 1st Platoon who could harmonize at all were whooping it up in the most popular song of the A. E. F. I was number four in the rear rank of the third squad. Corporal Campanero marched just ahead of me. Doc Makin was on his right. Mike Neff was number two, and Joe Beedy was the pivot man.

"Shake 'er up, Doc!" Sergeant Shevlin had called out, when we were a quarter of a mile from our billets, and Captain Cornwall had given us route step.

And now Doc Makin was leading us off in the first verse of the marching song:

"Oh, landlord, have you any wine?
Parley voo!
Landlord, have you any wine
Parley Voo!
Landlord, have you any wine
Fit for a soldier from the line?
Hinky dinky par-ley voo!"

The rousing old tune she went:

Ta-rum-te-dum-te-dum-te-d-i-i—
Rum-tee-doo!

And though we were marching in route step, we had no more than sung beyond the second "parley voo" when the hobnails of the whole platoon were clicking the rocks in perfect time, and everybody was rearing to go. There is nothing more wonderful for making you rear to go than harmony. It is even better than band music.

It was the middle of June now; and this morning the sun was rising up in a sky that didn't have a cloud. The grass was thick and green between the road and the hedges and stone walls which fenced the fields. Over to our left were two rows of poplar trees, running straight as far as we could see. They bordered the road to Saguenay, the 47th Division's headquarters town on the Loire River. On the level country that spread before us were dark green patches of pine woods and of orchards. Among them were lighter green patches of young wheat and barley. The grape vines were all greened out; cabbage, lettuce, carrot, beet, and turnip leaves covered the dirt of their rows in the little one- to three-acre farms here close to the town; so were the potato vines showing stems and leaves; pea vines were already appearing grown, and runners were beginning to curl around the bean poles. Chickens, ducks, and geese were racketing, and pigs were grunting and rooting in the yards of the bare plaster-wall farmhouses we passed—everything was just busting to grow and spread itself in the fresh sunny air of the June morning, and us Company F men were, too.

We were long past the rookie and camp-guard stages. We were veteran soldiers who had been having intensive training for a solid six weeks, and now we were soldiering right. We were toughened to drilling eight hours and hiking six miles every day. We had fired twenty rounds apiece on the rifle range. We had learned to throw hand grenades

and shoot rifle ones. We could knock our steel hats off and snap on our gas masks as easy and quick as we could slip our blouses on. We still had considerable trouble deploying into wave formation and following all of the platoon leader's complicated hand signals, but that was only Frog army stuff, and we didn't think much of it, anyhow. But if we would get balled up in the Frog deploying drill, we had certainly learned to rip a dummy into pieces with our bayonets. We were soldiering right most of the time, and everybody in old Company F felt like we were ready to meet any six companies in the Boche army and take them to a cleaning.

You ought to have seen that good old company of ours as it marched singing along that fine June morning; everybody with their steel hats wore cocky, their hair stringy, and their faces red and wet underneath, their eyes full of hell; all lean, hearty, and tough as harvest hands at the end of threshing time.

"Shake 'er up! Where's that old harmony?"

"Comin' up, sarge!"

"Yes, I have a daughter fine.

Parley voo!

Yes, I have a daughter fine.

Parley Voo!

Yes, I have a daughter fine.

Fit for a soldier from the line.

Hinky dinky par-ley voo!"

Hoomb. Hoomb. Hoomb. Hoomb.

The old 1st Platoon gang stepped hard together on the rocky road from Houel. And now the other three platoons were singing the "parley voo" song all along the column.

It was a song I'd have been ashamed to sing when I

was living in that far-away time in Clevisburg, or even when I was a Christian American soldier. But now I was just a buck private who was a hard-boiled hero in his company, so I rolled the lines out with never a blush.

Its verse went on to tell how the soldier from the line made the landlord's daughter come his way; and having done it, she had a baby, like they always do; and the last verse was about this baby boy:

"Oh, the little wee soldier he grew.

Parley voo!

The little wee soldier he grew.

Parley voo!

The little wee soldier he grew and he grew,

And now he's lovin' the ladies, too!

Hinky dinky par-ley voo!"

Ta-rum-te-dum-te-dum-te-d-i-i—

Rum-tee-doo——

Hoomb. Hoomb. Hoomb. Hoomb.

"Come on, gang, with the madamozel of Armentiers, and the French they are a peculiar race, and all the rest of it! Heads up, and let 'er rip!"

And we certainly did. She was always a fine old morning march them days out to the drill-field, when all the men of good old Company F was still together.

The drill-field was a rolly hundred acres, with rocky soil which would hardly grow grass and weeds. It belonged to one of the big Frog farmers which you find every so often in France, the ones who live in a regular mansion of a farmhouse which they call a chatoe. There were strips of pine woods on the north, south, and west sides of the hundred, and the Houel road ran along the east side.

When we had marched to the drill-field of a morning, with either Captain Cornwall or Johnny Hard leading us, we would fall out at the south woods for a rest until eight o'clock, when the day's drill would begin.

This particular morning Company E was ahead of us, and we fell out and spread ourselves in the woods just below this company. The other two battalions were in the north and the west woods. Companies G and H and the Headquarters and Machine-Gun Companies marched up behind us, twisting from the road like a monster brown snake. Major Kessler was already out in his motorcycle sidecar, and the two Frog lieutenant instructors were with him. When the other companies had reached the woods, he called Captain Cornwall, Johnny Hard, Lieutenant Grange, Dill, and Bucoda, and all the other 2nd Battalion company and platoon commanders around him. While the major was giving the company officers their orders, us soldiers set and leaned ourselves against trees, puffed on cigarettes, mopped our faces and hair, and hoped that we would have more of the simple bayonet fighting and less of the complicated deploying drill today.

We all stopped talking to stare at a long flying cloud of dust down the road. In two minutes our colonel was driven past us, in a Dodge sedan. It came to a sudden stop just opposite where I was resting. But the colonel never made a move. He just set and gazed straight ahead, like he was all alone in the world. Through the windows of his Dodge I got a fine side view of the colonel's face. It appeared very fine-edged, under an overseas cap hemmed in infantry blue, and with a silver eagle on the side. His iron-gray hair was shiny and fine, where it showed below the cap. The left eyebrow, which I could see, was thin and

black. His mouth was thin, too, and his chin came to a kind of round point.

We would never see very much of our colonel. Twice a week he'd come to the drill-field and once a month he'd hold a regimental parade. But he was always in our minds more or less. There was always orders on the company bulletin board, signed "Burton Nome, Col. Commanding 185th Infantry"; and whenever there were rumors about going to the front, and how we would fight when we got there, the old National Guards would always say; "You leave it to the colonel. He's a friend of Teddy Roosevelt's and one of the biggest men in Illinois. He'll take care of the 185th, all right!"

And that was the way even us drafted men had got to thinking about him. I should have been ashamed of it, but I hardly ever thought of Almighty God any more, and when I did, it was very often with the feeling that He must look like Colonel Nome and wear silver eagles on His shoulders.

The colonel still set there, looking straight ahead, as the company officers marched back to their outfits, with his hand coming up and dropping down in answer to the salutes. All of a sudden the colonel nodded and smiled, and the hand beckoned. Lieutenant Dill was called over to the colonel's car. And actually the colonel was so busy talking and laughing with the chubby lieutenant that he failed to see and answer Johnny Hard's salute, as our senior lieutenant strode by the car.

Captain Cornwall was still up with the gang around Major Kessler, and Johnny Hard fell the company in. When he had dressed us up, Lieutenant Dill was marching down behind the ranks. "Lieutenant Dill." Johnny Hard's

voice rolled out in a shout that made the colonel turn and stare. "Take the company!"

Lieutenant Dill's face had lost its smile and had its colicky baby's expression when he saluted and took his stand before the center of the company. Then he blinked and hesitated, like he usually did before he gave commands, and when he gave us a "Right by squads," it was in a squeaky yell which the flank corporals didn't get; and when we heard his "Ho," there was a ball-up as a lot of us started forward with the first squad, instead of going squads right. "As you were! As you were!" The little lieutenant's face was a beet-red and his neck was swelling over his blouse collar till he looked like he would bust. "The command was 'Right by squads!' Haven't you men learned to execute right by squads yet? Are you corporals all deaf? I want some attention in the ranks. Now! Squads right a—I mean—'right by squads! Forward! *Ho-uu!*" he squeaked, in a perfect fury, and then his thick, short legs went to running to the head of the column. When we swung into a column of platoons, I could see Johnny Hard standing over by the woods, with his arms folded, and staring at the company. And the colonel was watching, too.

Lieutenant Dill brought us on right into line, without making a bobble; and that appeared to hearten him, so that he took us in company front toward the colonel's car. But nobody could be sure of himself under the lieutenant's squeaked commands; and we bunched up, spread out, and ziz-zagged until we had a terrible front. And Lieutenant Dill got excited and made us worse than ever by screaming at the corporals and sergeants about the interval, dressing up, the step, and at the privates about straightening their rifles, and he nearly marched us over

the colonel's car. Then he gave us "Company" and "*Halt*" so close together that no two rifles came to order arms at the same time, and it *was* a mess of a line to dress up then. The colonel's car pulled up the hill. Then Johnny Hard took the company. We had no trouble in the company close-order then, for his commands whipped along the ranks in snapping shouts, and our feet and hands would mind them before we could stop to think whether we had understood him or not. For two hours he gave us everything, from mark time to double time, from right by file to company front, with hardly a rest. We fell out for ten minutes before we started on the grenade-throwing drill, and as we did, I heard Sergeant Mahler say to Sergeant Shevlin, "Johnny Hard pulled a boner, if you ask me. That stunt didn't please the C. O. any."

"Nobody's askin' you, you Dutch beer-keg!" growled Sergeant Shevlin, his eyes showing a steely, wrathful look instead of the usual good-natured one. "When the C. O. wants you to look out for his friends, you'll get orders, not askin'. Where'd you stow them dead grenades?"

The 1st Platoon sergeants were not the only ones who had been bothered by the trouble between the two lieutenants showing up like it had; it was felt all through the company. As Joe Beedy and I set together and rested and talked about the supper we'd have next Sunday night, and how would we celebrate the Fourth, and so on, I could hear the remarks from the soldiers around—"Aw, what you givin' us! The Colonel is thinkin' of the regiment, not of nobody like Pickle Dill." "Yeah, but Johnny Hard's in bad, anyway, and I'm tellin'——" "Tellin', hell, do you think the C. O. would let a bird like that take a platoon into action?" "Sure, Johnny Hard was just showin' him, and I'll bet he's showed, all right." "Well, you never

see the *skipper* puttin' anything over on the Pickle." ". . . and I'm tellin' the cockeyed world he'll spoil the whole company, if he ain't——" ". . . and I've heard of other birds like him gettin' it in the back——" "Soft pedal on that stuff, you damn——" "Yeah, here's Shevlin."

But after an hour of the grenade-throwing and an hour of musketry we began to drill like the old company again, feeling that the other outfits, which covered the drill-field with soldiers about as thick as sowed wheat, were only rookies beside us. Then the field kitchens swung up from the road and halted at the south woods. And from then on until the regiment was strung out in three snaky columns of twos, we had no minds for anything but when do we eat.

The mess didn't amount to a great deal, for it was front rations we got from the field kitchens. Some slum in the mess kit, in the lid a big spoonful of stewed tomatoes and hard bread, and two-thirds of a cup of coffee. The slum was never much to brag about, but usually the coffee and tomatoes went fine. The water we had to carry in our canteens was chlorinated, as they called it, so's to kill the germs which were in all Frog wells. It tasted like the bitters Pa used to take for his stomach, only there was no kick to it. And it was no good for your thirst, as you would be spitting cotton again a minute after you'd drunk it. But the stewed canned tomatoes were fine. When I was the thirstiest, I'd think there couldn't be anything better, and I'd take seconds and thirds on them till they were gone.

After mess it was loll around in the shade of the woods, with the tireddest soldiers laying flat, their heads on their packs, their steel hats shading their faces; with some of the Chicago soldiers gossiping about the old days when

they lapped up cold scoops at a saloon called Hinky Dink's and took their Janes to burlesque shows and beer gardens, and out to Jackson Park; with the rest of us telling about something or other that had happened back in our home towns, or down in Bordaie; and everybody kidding about the madamozels and madams in Houel, arguing about when we'd be sent to the front, and bragging about what we'd show the Marines and the regular soldiers whenever we got up there. One would be setting straight against a tree, with his steel hat pulled down over both eyes as he talked. Another would be propped on his elbow, with his steel hat cocked over one eye, while he winked and grinned with the other one. Another would be laying on his stomach, with his steel hat flat on the ground, and his chin resting on the top. Sunlight splashed down through the pine boughs. Cigarette smoke curled around until a breeze sailed through the trees and blew the smoke straight from our mouths. The breeze tickled our cheeks and necks and made us feel cool and good. The talking and smoking ran on until the company commanders signaled the senior duty-sergeants. Then it was fall in again.

After mess we limbered up with some squad drill, and then the company was formed for bayonet fighting, which to me was the most interesting drill of the day. It was always begun with a speech by Captain Cornwall or one of the lieutenants about what great hand-to-hand fighters Americans had always been, as could be proved by history itself. It was fine for us to learn to advance under strict discipline, behind a barrage, and fighting out machine-gun nests and pill boxes with bombs, automatic rifles, and hand grenades; but the main thing for real Americans to learn was how to mop up the enemy in a hand-to-hand fight. Then we were told why it was. The Boche, the

baby-killer, the butcher of women, we heard every day, was a coward, if one ever lived. The only way he would fight was at long range, in a trench, under the iron hand of the junker. He dreaded the sight of the cold steel, or a Colt, or a trench knife. Even an American fist shook in his face would make him yell, "Camyrad!" So the main thing we had to remember was that the Boche was only dangerous as a long-range fighter. In the front line we'd be safer than any place else, for the Boche artillery would be shooting over us. If the junkers made the Boche attack, he'd give up as soon as he saw the flash of our cold steel. When we attacked, he'd give up and yell, "Camyrad!" as soon as he saw how we could mop up with our bayonets.

"Men, get the spirit of the American hand-to-hand fighter!" Captain Cornwall used to yell. "Remember that the Boche is the worst devil ever let loose on the world! Remember the girls he raped and the babies he butchered in Belgium! Remember his submarines and his devilish slaughter of innocent women and children on peaceful ships! Remember the *Lusitania*! Remember his mutilations of captured American soldiers! Remember it all now in your bayonet-fighting drill, and imagine that you have the vile Boche, the worst criminal and coward of history, before your naked steel!"

The speech always sounded noble and grand whenever Captain Cornwall made it, as he had been a lawyer in Joliet, Illinois, and knowed how to roll out the words and look savage. Lieutenant Dill could make the speech very good too, except that he would squeak when he tried to yell the "Remembers!" too loud. Johnny Hard never made the speech at all, but he was always the officer who bossed the company through the bayonet fighting.

This day, as usual, he about-faced the rear rank, marched it out ten paces, then about-faced both ranks, had us take intervals of three paces, and ordered us to fix bayonets with the scabbards on. The sergeants and the other lieutenants strung along behind the ranks.

"On guard!" Johnny Hard's command cracked down the line.

Forward left foot. Fling up the rifle. Pop the sling down in the left hand. The right at the stock to guide the thrust. Arms bent. Knees springy. Scabbard point on a level with the eyes.

"Short—*point!*"

Down with the point for the Boche's guts. A short, savage jab. Jerk her back. On guard again. And these yells, as loud as we could rip them out, with the jab, the jerk, and the up on guard: "*You—damn—Boche!*"

"Long—*point!*"

Down with the point for the Boche's guts. A long thrust. Arms stretched. Knees bent. Lean out to get the bastard good. A hard jerk back. And the yells for this: "*You—God—damn—Boche!*"

"Short point—long point—butt strike—and pass over—*ho!*"

The same points this time. But advance a pace for each jab, thrust and jerk. The same yelling chorus of damning and God-damning the Boche bastards. The butt strike. Swing the butt of the rifle up, the bayonet back over the left shoulder. Forward, right foot, and slam the butt out for the Boche's face. Forward left foot, and hack him into the dirt, as the bayonet swings over and down. Pivot on the right. On guard again. *Ho!*

By this time every soldier with any man about him at all was in a fever heat and rearing to go. Johnny Hard's

snapping shouts seemed to just whip us into fierce feelings. And by the time the thrusting-, striking-, and passing-drill was done, we certainly were wishing it was the real Boche we had to tackle now with the naked steel, instead of just straw dummies of them.

Still, the charge through the dummies was always exciting and wild. By the time a platoon had ripped through the series, with the sergeants leading on, the soldiers keeping alignment as they short-pointed and butt-striked the swinging dummies, long-pointed the ones in the trenches, and finally leaped over a six-foot bank and buried their naked bayonets into the dummies on the ground below, everybody felt like they really had been in a battle attack on the Boche cowards. And I can tell you they usually needed some new dummies after old Company F had gone through them!

After the bayonet fighting we had disarming-exercises, in which we learned how to disarm any Boche who might happen to be battle-crazy and want to fight with his bayonet, and how to disarm one with our bare hands, if he was to come up when we had our bayonet stuck tight in the guts of another Boche; and we practised a lot of rascaling tricks which the officers said would work on a cowardly Boche every time. Then we drilled with trench knives, which had sharp-pointed blades shaped like a triangle file, so that when one was pulled out of a wound, the wound would close and bleed inside; and they had big knobbed handles that made it convenient for you to catch a Boche under the chin if you missed a poke at his throat.

After all that, the Frog deploying-drill, which took up a couple hours in the afternoon, seemed mighty tame. Besides, it was so infernally complicated, and there were so many movements and signals to remember, that a sol-

dier would have to think of about fifty things at once, and I, for one, could never get any of it straight. It was deploy from close order to platoon columns or squad columns, then into one wave or two waves in platoon front, with the two automatic-rifle squads, and the two bomb squads, the two rifleman squads, and the rifle-grenade squads in the first wave or second wave, on the right flank, the left flank, or the center, wherever the platoon leader wanted to signal them. And what a lot of signals to keep straight in your mind, if you did remember them! Besides all the ones for deploying, there were signals for column left, column right, forward, halt, to the rear, right or left by flank, prone, kneel, commence firing, rapid fire, cease firing, fix bayonets, and how many more I can't recollect. The corporals would get them mixed, and would bawl us privates out because we would scatter out every which way when it was their own fault, or else the fault of some lieutenant like Dill, who would get the signals all wrong himself.

But our platoon would usually make the best showing of all, and that was mainly on Sergeant Shevlin's account. He had a wonderful mind for this Frog deploying-drill, and a squad could never get very badly tangled before he would have it straight again. Still, we had never got through an afternoon without having some kind of a ball-up, and the other platoons were always having one. There was still more grief ahead for us in this drill, when we would get to deploying in company front, with the captain signaling orders to the platoon commanders, or sending them by leeson runners, while we would try to advance just like we were in battle.

This afternoon was about like any other, except that I had an extra hard bawling-out from Corporal Campanero

because I turned to the rear when we were double-timing, and started to run back, while the signal had been for us to fall prone. He said I would get bumped off at the front for running to the rear that way, and it was being just a mistake wouldn't make any difference; for up there the sergeants shot first, and asked what was the big idea afterwards.

That run-in with the corporal made me feel sullen and bitter until the infernal complicated drill was over with; but then all the companies formed for playing three-deep, hot-bottom, and some other fine games, and I got over the headachy Frog deploying-business.

Five o'clock, and we were formed into a column of squads for the march back to Houel.

We were all a dirty sight, after rasseling in the dirt with our disarming-exercises, crawling along in the Frog drill, and rolling around in the games. Our shoes were coated with dust; so were our leggins most of the way up, and our britches were streaked. Our shirts showed black splotches of sweat above our belts and in the armpits. As for our faces, about the only place a face showed itself was in the streaks where sweat had trickled down through the dust. Everybody was cussing the steel hat, which we were supposed to get used to, though nobody ever did. But when we were marching out in route step, there was a surprising lot of laughing and joking. After all, we were trained and tough, and the hardest drilling on the hottest day couldn't hurt us much. By six we'd be in our billets. Shave and clean up for retreat. Mess at seven, then a rest, and maybe a little while in the cool back room of the Red Bull. Wine and harmony. On our way.

On our way along the rocky road back to Houel, with

the shadows of the trees, the farmhouses, the hedges, the walls, and the marching soldiers ahead getting longer and longer. Marching along, hungry and tired, but feeling good, until Major Kessler played one of his tricks on us, and the yell, "Gas!" rolled down the line.

Then it was stop, swing your rifle down between your knees, knock your hat off so that the chin strap hung it from your arm, out with the mask from the bag on your chest, hold your breath until you had snapped the bands over your head and the clip over your nose, and the rubber breather between your teeth. A screech from the major's siren whistle. *Ho!*

We marched on. My nose itched and burned from the clip, the rubber made my mouth hot and dry, and I felt a sultry smother inside and out. How the sweat run! The goggle glasses were greased to keep them from fogging, but the sweat streamed over them just the same. Major Kessler made us march with the masks on for ten minutes, and it was misery and torment, if anything ever was. But we never crabbed, for the officers said we'd have to wear the masks for eight hours at a stretch in the lines. I didn't see how I ever could, and it was the most fearful thing I had to think about, as it seemed I'd never in the world get to feeling comfortable in a gas mask, no matter how much practice I had.

Well, it came to an end, after ten minutes that was like an hour. And we reached Houel with only one more miserable imaginary gas-attack.

Then the farm country was behind us and we were marching at attention between plaster houses that rose right up from the narrow sidewalks. Kids were hanging over the lower halves of the peculiar Frog doors, and back

behind them their mas and big sisters were watching us as we swung along. "Squads right! *Ho!* Compan-ee! *Halt!* Sergeant Shevlin—dismiss the company."

"Inspection—*arms!* Dis-missed!"

Then it was up behind Sergeant Shevlin, and into the loft of the big Tadousac barn. A sousing wash in a dishpan which I and Joe and Doc had brought for our private use. A shave with cold water and some smelly Frog shaving-cream, which certainly made me wish that the commissary would get in some good old Colgate's again. Change to my best uniform, my store leggins, and my russet shoes. Swab the dust off my star-gauge, a setting and resting on my straw tick while I did it. And the billet jammed with soldiers all going through the same performance.

Retreat, a hearty good mess, and then a spell of resting on my blankets, reading the Paris American paper to see if the Americans were still showing the Frogs and Limeys how to drive the cowardly Boches out of France. Then rousing up enough to start gossiping with Joe, who was sprawled out flat on his back, his hands under his head, gazing mournfully up at the heavy hewed rafters and the smoky red tiles of the roof. Doc Makin was lying back against his pack, lazily tuning at his banjo. Corporal Campanero was studying one of the Frog drill books, and frowning very intelligently about it. Mike Neff and Horse Karsak were stretched out on their sides, their heads propped by their bent arms, while they fooled away at a game of casino. Down along the billet the other three squads were doing about the same as ours.

"Goin' to see Odile tonight, Joe?" I said.

"Eoy, no. I'm about wore out way it is."

"Well, I ain't so tired now myself. But Joe, I'm about

sick of all this drillin', except for the bayonet fightin'."

"Same here. But she's got to be done. Hell, we ain't learnt to deploy as a company yet."

"What's the use of it, anyway, Joe? When all we need to do is to get out and give 'em the cold steel."

"Well, Matt, I'll tell you. Of course I know a soldier's got no business to figger, but, just the same, I can't help but figger a lot of that's bull about the cowardly Boches, and so on. I know how my luck's always been, and I'm expectin' a lot of trouble at the front."

"As for me," I said, "trouble's what I'll be lookin' for, Joe. But still I don't expect so much. The officers certainly know, and they wouldn't hardly lie, would they now?"

"Well," said Joe, "I'd never tell one he did."

I never said any more, for this kind of doubtful talk always made me feel shivery in spite of my faith in the officers. There was a chance Joe was right. Maybe it would be a good thing for us to have three or four months more of the deploying drill. But there were better things to think of.

"What do you say we mosey over to the Red Bull, Joe? How about you, Doc?"

They both groaned and stretched, and we argued back and forth, but finally we started for the ladder and clumb down.

"What's that gang over at the supply room?" said Joe, squinting to see across the big yard, as dark was beginning to come on. "Come on and let's see."

"What's the row?" he asked one of the dozen who were crowded around the supply-room door.

"It's Mechanic Shea's brother. He was at Cantigny. Rode over with an ambulance from Saguenay. Kind of shell-shocked, I'll say. Listen to 'im!"

The casual was setting on the counter just inside the door, and his brother was leaning over it behind him. His face looked gray when the candlelight flickered over it, and he had stary eyes. His voice sounded shaky and high.

"Oh, boy, Jeezus! I'll see it to my dyin' day—just his body standin' there for what was a good five-count, and his head, sliced off clean by a one-pounder, rollin' and bouncin' over a little bank. Oh, boy, Jeezus! Maybe some of youse know him. Tod Semple. Him and Marty here and me rasseled cabbages and spuds on Water Street together for a year. One fine guy, I'm tellin' yah. It makes me sick to think how it tickled me—Jeezus, I laffed! I laffed to see 'Tod's body standin' there, and his head rollin' down over a bank. I stood and laffed till a damn sniper got me in the elbow. Oh, boy, it'll always make me half crazy to think how I stood there and laffed!"

And blamed if he didn't laugh then, a jerky, graty laugh that made my blood run cold. And then he started to tell about a sixteen-year-old kid who'd got enlisted somehow, and he crawled out of a shell hole to snatch a fancy Boche officer's helmet, and was caught in a machine-gun cross-fire that ripped open his innards——

Well, I suddenly got to feeling absolutely sick and let down, as my stomach took a sudden turn, and I wanted to go and get something to settle it, but I had to stick with the others. They might have thought it wasn't my stomach, but just hearing the stories of the casual, so I gritted my teeth and stuck there until Joe Beedy himself said he'd heard of enough misery for one time, and we left for the Red Bull.

I was feeling gloomy and bad all evening. I couldn't relish Madam Rose's vin roosh, and I didn't have any

spirit for harmonizing, either. Even when we heard from Corporal Sumovski that Lieutenant Dill was going to take over the Headquarters Platoon, which Lieutenant Hepelwhite had been running for Johnny Hard, and not come to the drill-field any more, I couldn't feel like joining in the shouts of joy.

I kept trying to figure it out why it was that what I'd heard from the casual was so different from what I'd heard from the officers on the drill-field; and the more I figured the gloomier I was and the worse my stomach felt. I figured and figured, but it all seemed like a muss that nobody could make head or tails of. Somehow I had got to feeling absolutely sure that it would always be somebody else who would be gassed, wounded, or killed at the front. And now I had an awful feeling that my head could be sliced off by a shell, and roll and bounce down a bank as easy as anybody's. And the more I figured, the surer I was this was so.

It was just my luck to have a bilious spell and then hear stories like that on top of it. I felt worse every minute, and the figuring only made me more gloomy. So I left the jolly crowd even before tattoo blowed and rolled right into bed. I went to sleep with a headache.

VII

WAR



'M goin' to stick with you, Joe, old kid, whether or no. And you stick to me."

"All right, Matt. We'll stick and take 'er as she comes."

"If you was on the list, Joe, and I wasn't, I wonder if I could get away with it, goin' A. W. O. L. after you."

"If one of us is left off the list and the other's on it, we'll put 'er up to Johnny Hard, old kid. We couldn't hardly get away with that A. W. O. L. stuff, I figger."

"Joe, damn if I wouldn't be tempted to tackle it, anyway."

"Well, maybe we'll both be on the list, so don't worry till you see, old kid," said Joe, putting over his hand and sort of shaking my shoulder.

"I ain't worryin', old kid, except about us bustin' up," I said. "But I'll tell you, I'm liable to go A. W. O. L. if they do leave me off the list. That'd be better than S. O. L. back here."

Joe grinned at that, and I had to chuckle myself, for I thought it was a pretty good crack. And then I didn't say any more until we had finished our chow.

Company F was eating its noon mess on this middle July day in the big yard that had the Tadousac barn on one side, the company kitchen and supply room on the far end, some poor people's shacks on the side opposite the barn, and a street cutting at an angle across the open end.

After two hours on the drill-field this morning, a motorcycle rider had fogged up with an order to march the regiment back to its quarters. It was war now, right enough. But not for the outfit. The 47th had been made into a depot division. About half of the privates in every infantry company were to be shipped out tomorrow as replacements to some division that was already fighting on the front. The rest we knowed was only rumors. The other privates might be sent up as replacements later, while the non-coms would be left behind to train rookie soldiers as they came over from the States. Or the division might be filled up again later on and be sent to the front when it was trained better and the soldiers could go through the deploying drill without a bobble. But right now the gangs of soldiers who were jammed together in the shady spots, setting with their mess kits between their stretched-out legs, were all arguing and wondering about who would be on this first list. But nobody could know. Not in this man's army, as we all said.

After mess it was gang around the streets and in front of the billets, crab and swear about our hard luck in being busted up, argue, wonder, and figure over who'd be on the first list, until the first sergeant sent word around to the platoon sergeants to fall-in the company. It was the quietest falling-in I'd ever seen. There wasn't a laugh or a cuss word heard. And when First Sergeant Novak, frowning very seriously over some papers that he held in his right hand, called us to attention, it wasn't with his usual booming yell, but he simply said, "Company—'shun." He dressed us up, and then reported the company to Captain Cornwall.

The captain made us one of his serious lawyer speeches. I heard his first words plain, and then I noticed my

stomach was beginning to turn, like it had on that night a month ago when I heard the casual from Saguenay tell war stories. I had never felt just exactly right since that night. Several times that miserable bilious feeling had come back. I'd been all right this morning in the excitement of marching in from the drill-field and while I was talking with Joe at noon mess. But now that I was standing quietly at attention, not hearing a sound from the ranks, and with the captain's voice rolling out so solemnly, I began to notice that I was feeling powerful unsettled inside again. It might have been something in the mess; I'd notice that the dried peaches were raw and tough; anyway, I was feeling chilly inside, and I burned around my neck and ears. My heart pounded as I thought I might be coming down with chills and fever—or even typhoid—and then some of the captain's words began to hammer into my head:

“ . . . replacements . . . one hundred and eight privates . . . others held for further training . . . sure all Company F men will maintain the honor of their company, regiment, and division at the front . . . non-commissioned officers will be kept here permanently as a training cad. I am ordered to report to the judge advocate. Lieutenant Grange will be transferred to the brigade staff. Lieutenant Heppelwhite has been appointed regimental gas-officer. Lieutenant Hute will remain, as your company commander.”

There was a stir in the ranks at that, and the captain paused. Then his voice rolled out again in the quiet.

“You have been true soldiers, ever mindful of duty, and it has been an honor to command you. Remember—all for America's great cause—sweep autocracy from

God's fair earth—make the world safe for democracy—bless you, and goodbye.

"First Sergeant Novak—take the company."

The first sergeant saluted from the company's right flank. He marched to the center and faced us. Then he lifted the papers and began to read.

It was a division order for fourteen hundred privates from our regiment. They were to be issued full trench-equipment and marched to Saguenay in the morning. I held my breath while he read it. Then, while he threw a sober look along the ranks, I heaved a big sigh. He started to call the names on the list. The chilly feeling in my middle spread, and frosty prickles run up my backbone.

Abbott—Ackerman—Allen—Apfel—and others between—soon the A's were nearly through.

"Ardell—George Harrison!"

"Here!"

That was shouted in my ear, for Ardell was on my right in the rear rank. He was a big, dark-complected drafted man from Wisconsin, and we had never become friends because he never had a word to say to anybody. From the corners of my eyes I could see him licking his lips and swallowing hard.

"Baumann—Rudolph Martin!"

The first sergeant was calling down in the B's. I held my breath and strained my ears until—and here it come:

"Beedy—Joseph Jackson!"

"Yo!"

Old Joe never licked his lips or swallowed or did anything but twist his head a little and give it a nod back at me. But I swallowed hard myself; I simply couldn't help

it. And now my heart began to thump until it felt like it would break through my ribs, my face felt afire, and my stomach was like a chunk of ice. But in spite of these bilious sick feelings I kept my mind on the fact that if my name wasn't called now, I'd certainly have to ask Johnny Hard to let me take somebody else's place. I'd have to do it on account of Joe, even if I was actually taken down sick. But it wouldn't do any good then, for I couldn't go if I was sick—but, oh, thunder, I was thinking like a crazy fool—I'd certainly go up with the next bunch, anyway—that might be a month away—but then I wouldn't be with Joe—but the first sergeant's calls and the soldiers' "Yo's!" and "Heres!" were rolling on—the M's were coming——

"Luder—Peter Ludwig!"

"Yo!"

"Lumley—Harold Price!"

"Here!"

"Martin—Claude Henry!"

"Yo!"

"Mason—John Thomas!"

"Yo!"

The first sergeant stopped to wet his thumb and turn a paper. Here it was—here it come—I followed Jack Mason on the company pay-roll—the first sergeant looked at the paper, swung his gaze down to the company's left, and——

"Merz—Fred William!"

Oh, lordy! lordy!

"Yo!"

"Mestoro—Antonio Tito!"

"Yo!"

The calls and answers rolled on and on. I was out of it.

For this time anyway, I thought over and over. I'd have to ask Johnny Hard; but now I had the certainest feeling that he would never in the world change the list to suit anybody. I couldn't help but feel a powerful relief over it at first; but then I got to staring at the back of Joe's head, where his black hair come down to a point inside his blouse collar; and such a sorry feeling for him come over me that it even smothered my chills and fever down, and I begun to wish with all my soul that my name had been called, too. I was so moved that I leaned over and whispered: "You're not goin' to leave me back here, old kid, anyway. Not for a minute! We're goin' to give the Boche the cold steel together. I'll see——"

"Silence in the ranks! Tenino—Francisco Joseph!"

"Yo!"

Most of the Italians in the company was on the list, and I remembered now that the first sergeant had called the name of Gregorio Roderigo Domingos, too. Good old Gregorio. He had kept his mouth shut about that battle with the engineers, and had never even intimated to anyone that he and his friends helped me out in cleaning them. There was still a chance that court martial charges might be made, but every so often I would call him to one side and promise him that I was still determined to keep my mouth shut about him and his friends. But now that was over.

"Zurich—Stephen Franz!"

"Yo!"

The call was done. The first sergeant ordered the platoon sergeants to take the men whose names had been called and line them up at the supply room to be issued their full trench-equipment and emergency rations. Retreat would be held as usual. The replacements would

march for Saguenay at seven in the morning. Any questions? All right. Dismissed.

The rest of the afternoon was just a rush and clatter all over the little Frog town. At every company supply room soldiers were lining up to turn in their russet shoes and extra blouses, blankets, and britches, and were getting ammunition, an extra pair of trench shoes, cans of corn Willy, and cartons of hard biscuit. Serious-looking officers were on the go to and from regimental headquarters. Motorcycles, with their mufflers open, banged through the streets, scaring the Frog people half to death. The madams and madamozels made little bunches in front of their houses, and they gabbled and waved their hands, all about twice as excited as the soldiers were. Somebody had fed them the rumor that the Boche had broken through our lines. About half of them believed it, and none of the soldiers would spoil the joke by telling them different.

When Joe Beedy got away from the supply room with his equipment and rations I was waiting, and I followed him up to the billet. I set on my blankets, never saying a word, but just watching him as he fussed around with his stuff, checking it over, and putting it in shape so that he could roll it up fast in the morning. Now he was about all through, just smoothing his blankets and shelter-half out. In a minute he'd turn around, with that fine, friendly look in his mournful eyes. And I'd have to—yes, sir, I was going to fight that shivery feeling down and not let myself feel sick, and when he looked around I was—but I couldn't smother a big sigh when he did turn himself and smile. My throat felt hoarse and I had to clear it a couple of times. But I said it.

"Well, we're goin' over to see Johnny Hard about that—ain't we, old kid? I guess—we got to stick, if we can, Joe."

"Maybe it won't be no use," sighed Joe, sadly shaking his head, "but I'm sure glad you feel that way, Matt, old kid. I'm goin' into trouble. I feel it in my bones. But it's sure noble of you to want to come along."

"Aw, that's nothin', Joe."

"Boy, it's a lot to me."

Joe had been such a real friend to me ever since that night I'd cleaned the engineers, and he appreciated me wanting to stick as his bunkie so much, that I was warmed all through. And over and over I kept saying to myself, "I honestly hope I can stick! I honestly do!" as we walked side by side to the orderly room, so close together that our arms touched most of the time. I wouldn't let myself think of the sick spell I'd had when the names were being called, but my heart was bound to thump against my ribs.

We came to a sudden halt in the orderly-room door. The place looked full of officers and non-coms. At a table in the corner next to the front window Lieutenant Grange, Lieutenant Bucoda, and the company clerk were going over several stacks of service records. Lieutenant Dill was setting at the table, too, but he was half turned around in his chair and staring with a frown at Sergeant Shevlin and Johnny Hard. Our senior lieutenant was standing with his hands in his pockets, and he was shaking his head at his chief duty-sergeant.

"She's no use, Shevlin. She's no go," said Johnny Hard. "Hell, I asked the C. O. to get out of here myself. The orders is to stick. That's her, sergeant, and it's no use."

"Sir, with the lieutenant's permission, I might suggest that a sergeant could be busted, sir, and go up as a private."

"Sorry, my lad, but I'm not in the habit of bustin' sergeants of your class. You'll keep your stripes and set tight."

"Sir, I don't want to strut—but I'd get 'em again!"

"Well, it's no use to talk. Jeezus, Shevlin, think of the years I've soldiered! And when I spot a chance to play an ace-high hand in the biggest war game that ever struck the table—what do I get? A chance to train mobs of boots into soldiers in a month! And the front lousy with war babies! But, hell, why should I crab? This ain't like no other war that ever was. It's for a great cause, that's her, sergeant. And we should all be proud to have any place that our ability will fill. That come from Lieutenant Dill. He's a great little consoler. He's about consoled me into settin' tight. Anyway, sergeant, orders is orders."

"Since my name is mentioned, I'll say a word," said Lieutenant Dill, rising from his chair. "Explanations, sergeant, are hardly required from your commanding officer. No soldier may require them of his superiors." The little lieutenant blinked a wicked glance at Johnny Hard, then he stepped over in front of Sergeant Shevlin and proceeded to set on him right. "Sergeant, your request was denied. That's enough. But I wish to give you a word of warning. There is a certain memorandum from the regimental commander which states that all non-commissioned officers of the 87th Infantry whose conduct causes them to be reduced to privates will be transferred, not to combat divisions, but to labor battalions. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"You need not consider what I have said as a reprimand, sergeant."

"Very well, sir."

"That is all I have to say."

"Very well, sir."

Lieutenant Dill turned back to his chair looking mighty proud of himself. He set down, cleared his throat a couple of times, puffing his pudgy cheeks and pursing his lips as he did; then he went to frowning over the service records.

Johnny Hard heaved his shoulders, took a big breath, and then walked over to the first sergeant's desk, without looking any more at either Sergeant Shevlin or Lieutenant Dill. Joe and I backed out of the door as the sergeant lunged for it at a lick that was almost double time. As he swung out he jammed his overseas cap down so hard that it touched his ears on both sides. His brown jaws and cheeks had turned to a rusty red and his gray eyes were simply smoking. He spotted Joe and I as he swung off the doorstep, and he wheeled.

"'Lo, Beedy, you lucky son of a—say, you guys, listen. I'm gettin' all set to make a charge in the Battle of Cognac Hill tonight. Come along, you two, if you feel like 'er. I'll get a gang and we'll tear loose. Buson's back room, see, an hour after mess. There'll be a gang, and cognac a plenty."

He started off again, but turned back, and said more quietly, "Got a hump, anybody?"

I gave him a Camel, he lit it, tramped on the match, and blew a cloud of smoke over the fiery end of the cigarette.

"Some war, I'll say. That little fat-hipped bird is gettin' high and cocky, for some reason. He's tryin' to run the company. Some war, by Jeezus!"

Sergeant Shevlin stamped away for good then, and disappeared in the door of the bakery. We watched until he was gone, then I looked at Joe, sighed deep, and lifted a foot to the step of the orderly-room door.

"She's no use, old kid," said Joe, hauling me back. "You heard what Johnny Hard said. All you'd get would be your leg in a sling. Pickle would simply eat your liver out, like he did sarge."

Well, at that I don't know what it was come over me, but all of a sudden I forgot about my sick spell and everything else except a rage that boiled up in me until I felt so mad I could have bitten into a nail; and I went to cursing and swearing, kicking at the rocks in the street, and declaring that I wouldn't stay back here and soldier another minute; I'd go A. W. O. L. after Joe, and I'd do it in the morning; I'd stick to Joe and go to the front with him, or bust a leg trying; and old Joe was doing his best to console me and soothe me down.

"It's no use, Matt, old kid. It's this man's war for you, every time. It's my hard luck, anyway, not yours. And I can stand it, I guess, for it's what I've had all my days."

"It's a dirty shame, Joe, and I tell you I'm not goin' to stand for it."

"Boy, yes you will. You'll just set tight, like the rest."

"I will like hell! I'm goin' to the front—that's how I'll set tight!"

Right then I heard a step behind me, and I turned with a jump as a strange voice said, "Ze front? Non, non, moan sher. He's pa bon, bokoo misere, ze front sa."

Joe and I both stared into the black eyes of a big husky of a young man in a Frog army uniform. There was a war cross with a couple of palms on its ribbon and the Frog military medal pinned above the left breast pocket

of his blouse. He raised his hand, twirled the ends of a tremendous, shiny mustache, and a row of snowy teeth showed in a grin.

"'Allo, Americans. You would go to ze front, non? Pour kwah? You will be 'eroes? You will get ze croy de gear? Alor, you will get—ka-ta-woom! ka-ta-woom! tut-tut-t-t-t-ut! hom! hom! hom! ah-k-k-ah—big shell, machine gun, grenade, and gas—ze hell, savvy, you will get, I'll say me, Sergeant Buson. May, bon chance."

He made a flashy salute, grinned again, and swung on through the Tadousac gate.

"The hell you bawl out," I muttered, when he was gone.

"I guess he's been through it," said Joe. "But these Frogs are all so stuck on theirselves it makes me sick to look at them."

We did keep on looking at this Black Jean Buson, though, until we saw Junie run out of her kitchen door. The big sergeant met her with a laugh, grabbed her and swung her up in the air, set her down like a feather, bowed, and gave her his arm. She put her hand in it and walked beside him in her usual swaying, dancing way until they were inside.

"That's another treat for Johnny Hard," said Joe. "Well, we might as well mosey back to the billet, old kid, I guess, and chew the fat while we got a chance."

My rage had cooled down considerably by now, but all the rest of the afternoon it would flare up again every once in a while and I would crab and swear about not being on the list, and I'd declare that I still had half a notion to go A. W. O. L. to the front, anyway.

I had plenty of sympathy, for everybody was sore and half sick over the company busting up; and it was a sorry and grouchy-looking outfit that fell in for retreat.

That formation is one I can never forget. The bugle notes of the retreat call are naturally sad; and this night, as we stood at parade rest and thought of how so many of us who had soldiered together for such a long time might never see each other again, the retreat bugle notes seemed actually to mourn.

It was likely that the same feeling was all through the regiment. The three battalions filled three sides of the square. Every one of the companies had got to be something like a big family. In the morning half of the boys would be marching away to join strange outfits in the battle line.

Now the bugles were silent.

The long shadows of buildings covered most of the square. But over in front of regimental headquarters soft, gold sunlight shone in the folds of Old Glory and the regimental flag. The evening breeze lifted and waved them, lazy and slow.

"Present—*arms!*"

The band struck up the national song of France. I had heard it a hundred times and more, but rousing music like that would always stir me, and tonight it moved me more than ever before. The sound rolled all my sad feelings away. And I wasn't raging any more, either. I fasted my ears on the sound and my eyes on the colors of Old Glory waving in the light. And all of a sudden I was ashamed of myself for having raged and crabbed against the orders that kept me from going to the front with Joe. The patriotic soldier never questioned his orders. The officers had hammered that into our heads time and again. That was what Johnny Hard and Lieutenant Dill had both meant when they talked to Sergeant Shevlin in the orderly room. I would have realized it then if I

had only stopped to figure it out; but no, I had to forget all patriotic ideas, and rear around and crab at the orders like I'd never had a day of army training and didn't know what they meant in my country's war.

The regimental band was swinging into "The Star-Spangled Banner." The drums rattled and boomed, the cornets and trombones blared up on the high notes, the bass horns snorted and rumbled in harmony, and the music lifted me right up to my better self. Right then I loved America better than anything else in the world. I was over here in her great cause, and if the orders had been for me to go to the front and fight for her, why, I'd have gone without a word. And if the orders was for me to stay behind, why, I ought to do that without a word, too. Well, I would from now on. I'd be resigned to my patriotic duty.

"Oh, say, does the star-spangled banner yet wave——"

The band was soaring in the music of that part of the beautiful song. Something warm seemed to be choking in my throat. I was afraid my eyes was going to get wet. Just at hearing now the music of my country's beautiful song——

"O'er the land of the free——"

It gave me a glorious exalted feeling to listen to that grand strain and vow to myself at the same time that I would never swear and crab at orders again, but I'd be a patriotic soldier for my country or die.

"And the home of the brave!"

"Order—*arms!* First Sergeant Novak—dismiss the company."

Of course there was a let-down in my feelings when we were tramping back to the billet again. But I was still resigned. If the orders was for me to stay here and drill

my head off, why, I'd simply buckle down and do it. I'd be a soldier right, even if I didn't get to the front all through the war.

Madam Odile met Joe and I at the billet ladder. She had a last supper fixed up for Joe.

"You come along, too, old kid," he said to me. "I guess you're due to step into my shoes there, anyway."

I told Joe to quit his kidding, that Odile would never look at anybody after having him, but I couldn't stop a hope from sneaking in that maybe she would. If I was kept back here where I'd see her every day, I couldn't help it. That was orders. And I was resigned.

VIII

THE BATTLE OF COGNAC HILL



ERGEANT SHEVLIN'S cognac party in an old storeroom of the Buson bakery had been under way for an hour. It was a big, bare room, with walls and a ceiling that had been whitewashed once, but which were smoky and dirty now. All the light we had was from three candles stuck in bottles along the table. The smoke that curled up from our cigarettes was lost in the smoky dark of the ceiling. But the blouses around the table had a handsome look in the dim light, and everybody's laughing face had a glow around it. The glasses and bottles gleamed on the rough, black table, the cognac sparkled when it was poured into a glass, and there were clinking sounds as the talking, laughing, and harmonizing went on. And I simply reveled in it all. I never thought about it then, but I had never got farther from my home folks and my home ways.

Drink, talk, laugh, and sing. The time went on without us knowing it. And we got drunker every minute without hardly knowing it, either. And all the time we were getting fuller of friendly feelings and good nature about each other, too. It was the last night of old Company F. Tomorrow—but we wouldn't talk about tomorrow while we were going so good. This was tonight. The last good old time.

"Hey, Jack, we won't never forget that first time we went on pass to Bordaïre?" "I'll say not. Didn't that

dozen-egg omelet knock us for a row?" "Oh, boy! And we didn't know how to say 'oofs' and you cackled like a hen." "And what a time we had makin' the madam know we wanted fried spuds!" "Yeah, we didn't know how to say 'pum de tare' and finally I had to go to the kitchen to look for 'em——" "Yes, and it took you half an hour——" "Boy, don't fret, I was only lookin' for spuds." "Yes, you was! Say——"

That was Dan Logan and Jack Mason running on together. Sergeant Shevlin and George Shempky were going it in the same style about Clark, La Sal, and the Loop back in Chicago; Corporal Pinky Funke and Mike Neff were having a solemn argument about the signals of the Frog deploying-drill that made me laugh for some reason whenever I had time to listen to it; and Doc Makin and Buck Cody were having a hot argument about how to handle women, their arguments running in this style:

"Listen here, Buck, I'm a chiropractin' doc, ain't I, and us docs knows more about women than anybody else does; and I'm tellin' you straight you gotta be roman'ic. Yesir; roman'ic and gen'le and sof'. You gotta coax and pet 'em along with sof', gen'le, and roman'ic talk, and with songs and flowers—jus' like that, 'less she's a Hunyok." "G'wan! You're fulla bunk, like all the docs! No wonder you croak everybody. Women is all alike when it comes to lovin'. They all want the rough stuff, see, don't care who they are. Find a man who always has a woman comin' his way, and you'll find every time he has one rule and regulation: 'Treat 'em rough and tell 'em nothin'.' That's the only system, I'll tell the cockeyed world." "Only system, hell! How do you get that way?" "Boy, I know!" "You know nothin'!" "I don't? Say, listen! I'll tell you

sump'n happened to me person'ly. One night I was cattin' down Clark Street——”

I set and listened mostly and only put in a wise crack to everybody in general whenever I thought of one. Like when Fabienne brought out another bottle and I throwed down a dees-franc note to pay for it, as I had just got another \$25.00 from home. “Hey, this is the sarge’s party!” yelled Shempky. “He’s lousy with our crap money, anyways.” And I came back with this: “Boy, let me blow. Ain’t I the Kansas Cyclone, huh?” That made everybody roar, and I had to chuckle myself, as it seemed pretty good. And Sergeant Shevlin, who had been hitting the cognac all afternoon before the party, staggered up to his feet, swung his glass around, and bawled: “Heresh to th’ol’ Kansush Kid, champeen rough-houser ’n’ bay’net fighter of the Firsh Platoon! Ah vote sonty, ev’body!”

They all yelled and laughed at that, and I just grinned all over myself and felt more resigned than ever at staying back here with what was left of good old Company F. Sergeant Shevlin set down again and said to George Shempky that he believed, b’god, he was drunk; and he ought to be ashamed of himself, for he was a bartender by trade; but every man got drunk at least once in his life, if he *was* a man; and even a bartender would do it one time, if he was a man, too.

Joe Beedy hadn’t been saying a word during this performing. He would just tilt his chair back from the table, set with his hands down in his lap, and stare mournfully into the sparkling glass of cognac which he held in the two of them. Whenever he drank, he would throw his head back and swallow, then stare mournfully into the empty glass until I had filled it again. Once in a while he would throw his sad, friendly look around the table, or

sigh and gaze up at the smoky white beams of the ceiling.

But the fourth glass got him warmed up and he suddenly busted out into a song. What he picked was the "parley voo" song; and now we certainly did go to harmonizing whole-heartedly, as we thought of how many times the old 1st Platoon had sung it on the hike to the drill-field; and at the last verse we were harmonizing it in such a roaring style that Fabienne Buson run in, waving her hands, and crying, "Pa see fort! Seel voo play—pa see fort! Les m. p.'s!"

"The kid's ri'," said Sergeant Shevlin, sobering a little. "Heads up or the lousy m. p.'s 'll be on our tail for a fact."

I quailed down mighty quick then, as I was still fairly sober, and I certainly didn't want to get into trouble with the m. p.'s, now that I had become patriotic and resigned, and had determined to soldier strictly according to orders. And the others were quieter, too, after we had harmonized through the "drunk last night and drunk the night before" song, and Joe had led us into the lovely, sentimental one about my Indiana home.

We were drowsing along on the chorus, for the third time——

"Back home again in Indiana,
And it seems that I can see——"

when the door from the bakery was flung open with a hard slam.

The harmonizing stopped that quick, and we all half jumped up, expecting to see an m. p. But it wasn't. The frame of the Frog sergeant, Black Jean Buson, filled the doorway.

He loomed up like a giant, there in the half-dark. He

was naturally wide-shouldered and big-chested, and his army blouse, with its flaring tail, made him appear wider and bigger than ever. His hair was parted on the side, and it looked as though it had been shaken over his head like a black mane. His thick eyebrows and his tremendous spike-ended mustache bristled. Even there in the dark his black eyes shone. When he spoke, the words rolled out in a kind of bass singing.

"Pardon. Me, I'm soldat Francesay. Sergeant Buson."

We all knewed who he was, as he was the hero of the neighborhood, and he had come home on leave the day before. As he was Fabienne's cousin, Sergeant Shevlin had to treat him like a brother, and so he shoved himself to his feet, staggered over, and shook hands heartily, rolling out a regular stream of Frog talk as he did. Black Jean laughed, slapped him on the back, and then about half carried him over to the table. Then he set down himself, poured out a glass of cognac, waved it at everybody, and drank it down.

"Hom!" he said, smacking his lips and looking around, with his black eyes brighter than ever. "Zat make ze blood fight like 'ell. Bring on ze Boche, honh? Un regiment. Zom! Zom! Zom! Toot fini!"

I couldn't keep a grin off my face; that was the way with the Frogs; always bragging about what they would do, but waiting for the Americans to come and drive the Boche out of France. I thought of a pretty good crack and winked around at the gang as I got ready to say that he would be safe enough here, with this gang of American soldiers; but he was a sergeant and he was wearing a croy de gear and a military medal; so I was sober enough to decide that I hadn't ought to make such a crack to a veteran, no matter how good it was, and I didn't.

"Hom!" he said again. "You go to ze front deman matin, honh?"

Everybody tried to be friendly and polite, and we all went to explaining at once about our regiment being busted up. Sergeant Shevlin was too drunk to help out much, but Black Jean finally got the idea through his head.

"Ah, ees too soon, too queek, you know," he said frowning. "Ze new soldat, he is like zis——" And he poured out a thimbleful of cognac into a glass and drank it down. "Ze ol' soldat who is bon pour ze front I show—vala!" And blamed if he didn't pick up the quart bottle of cognac, which was two-thirds full, tilt it up, and swig the whole works down like a calf drinking milk! We were all too paralyzed to say a word. "Whuf!" sighed the Frog sergeant, as he set the bottle down. His face turned pale around his mustache, and the blood showed in the whites of his eyes for a second; then he banged the table with his fist and roared out a wild laugh. "Ah, my fine Americans, for one year I 'ave but ze peteet rum ration. Bon comyrads, mercy bokoo!"

"He might try buyin' a bottle himself," I whispered to Joe Beedy.

Joe didn't say a word. He was staring at Black Jean, his eyes narrowed in a crazy look, and I realized that Joe was about as drunk as Sergeant Shevlin, and that he had taken a powerful dislike to the Frog sergeant. I did myself, after he went to bawling out brags about the Frog army, and tried to lecture us like a bunch of school kids.

"Ha, I know zis armee American! I see at ze front bokoo troub'. Brave! Fight, what you say, like 'ell. But no school militaire! No dis'pleen! No leeson! Mavay

maneu'! Capitans, lieutenants, sergeants—ne comprond pa. Duhs and—doo year, savvy voo, ze armee American bon—tray bon!”

Well, if we hadn't been feeling so good-natured from our cognac and harmonizing, we'd have boiled over and showed that Frog sergeant something he didn't know about fighting right there. But we knowed it was only the Frog way. The Frogs had no idea of how to be civilized and polite, not any more than the Limeys did; they would horn in anywhere among a gang of Americans, bum drinks off them, then brag about what a great army France had, and intimate that it would take two years of training and fighting to make the American army half as good. Americans would usually just laugh at such fool talk, knowing how far behind the times France was and that the Frogs wasn't much better than heathen; and all of us would only have laughed at this Black Jean if I hadn't got an idea for a crack that was too good to keep. I knowed it would get under his hide, but I never had any idea it would make him so crazy mad. The idea come when Black Jean asked if Johnny Hard was going to the front. He scowled when he asked it, and I figured right away he'd been hearing an earful of spiteful gossip from Madam Rose. So I couldn't help but wink at the others and say very seriously, “No, sergeant. Lieutenant Hute'll never leave this town till he's copped that little Tadousac madamozel. Savvy, sergeant? Junie Tadousac. Junie and the lieutenant—oo, la, la!”

It was simply killing to see the look that come over that Frog's face. I was about tickled to death, but I kept my own face straight, and it was worth five dollars to see him glare and hear him grit his teeth as I rambled on seriously with a lot of stuff that was partly true, and

partly made up to give a real tone to the joke. I probably got to going a little too strong, as Corporal Pinky Funke growled out something about cutting it out; and then Sergeant Shevlin, who had gone about half dead to the world roused himself and mumbled, "Lay off Johnny Hard, see. Chop 'er." I did then, but Black Jean was already wild-eyed. He jumped up and banged the table so hard with his hairy fist that two bottles rolled to the floor. Three or four of us couldn't help but laugh, and then he roared, "Hom! Ha, you laugh—whinh! whinh! —cochons! Lieutenant 'ute—Lieutenant Embuskay—sa! Ze grand, brave lieutenant! Bah! I am fiansay Junie Tadousac—me, Sergeant Buson, Black Jean de Houel—I make ze lieutenant in ze piece—vala—com se, com sa. Hom!"

He slapped himself over his cross and medal with one fist, and he banged on the table again with the other. I begun to wish I hadn't made my joke now, for everybody seemed to grow raging mad in a minute, and the room was filled with yells and cusswords: "Get out, you bughouse Frog, before you're throwed out!" "Go hire a hall!" "Who invited you to this party, anyway?" "If Johnny Hard was just to spit in your eye, you'd bust out cryin'!" "Beat it now, while the beatin's good, you——"

"So?"

Black Jean's hairy, big hand whisked under the tail of his blouse and swung back with an automatic. He laughed devilishly and his eyes shone the same way as he tossed it clear to the ceiling. It spun back neatly into his hand.

"Lüger! Play I am ze Boche. Come for ze Lüger. Al-lon!"

For a five-count there wasn't a sound in the room. I

set like I was petrified, but my heart had begun to pound like a trip hammer. I jumped at the sound of breaking glass. It was Joe Beedy; he had bitten the side out of a cognac glass, a low whining sound was coming out between his clinched teeth, and his eyes were just slits and crazy hot. Then, before I could lift a finger, he had snapped a bottle at Black Jean. It knocked the Boche pistol from his hand. He bent for it, and the rush started.

I was in it somewhere. I didn't know how I'd got to my feet. The same red haze that had swum around me when the engineers jumped me in Bordaïre was half blinding me now. I was being jammed towards Black Jean, the cussing and yells making a stormy roar in my ears. Jamming ahead—and then we all heaved back together. Black Jean was up, waving the Luger like a club. His black mane was stringing over his eyes, and he was bawling like a mad bull.

“Cochons—whinh! whinh!—hom!”

A bottle smashed just above his head. He ducked another one, and lunged, swinging the Luger. But Joe Beedy had dived for his legs. He went down; we piled on him; he fought himself to his feet again——

“The m. p.'s!”

And then it was a horrible jam and scramble for the door. Joe Beedy had me by the arm.

“Here—this way to the billet—you damn fool!”

We pounded it our hardest down the dark street. Four or five of us ducked in behind the Tadousac barn. We stood and panted for a few seconds, then we heard other feet pounding along. Joe peeked out.

“They're gettin' old Shevlin,” he muttered, and picked up a stone.

Sergeant Shevlin, running like he had the blind staggers, loomed into sight. An m. p. was gaining on him. Joe Beedy let the stone fly. The m. p. went down flat. But he wasn't knocked out. Right away he set up, groaning, and holding his head. The rest of us helped the sergeant on and up into the billet.

So another attack in the Battle of Cognac Hill was made and done.

But the night wasn't done—not for I and Joe Beedy. How many times afterward I wished that I had rolled in when taps blowed, like I should have done, and let Joe go over to Madam Odile's by himself. If I had dreamed that Joe would become as sad and sentimental as he did, and would tell such a story, bringing up such a thing between us, making me so torn up and miserable in my mind—but nobody never can tell what the littlest, insignificant thing may do to their life.

So, when Joe Beedy said, "You come along, old kid, and we'll drink our last bottle of vin roosh together in Odile's back yard," I never thought any more than that I was still too excited to roll in and sleep, and that I could be with good old Joe for a while longer and calm myself down with some of Odile's wine at the same time.

So there we set in her back yard, looking out at her garden and the apple tree, which was all shadowy now, and Madam Odile opened the last bottle of wine we was to drink together.

I was in pretty much of a fever from excitement and all the cognac I'd drunk, but right now old Joe seemed to be much further gone. He sipped at the wine; then he made a fool joke or two, and laughed his long, slow, mournful laugh over them; and finally he went into a sad,

sentimental spell about Black Jean, and he more than run on.

"I had never ought to drink cognac, Matt, old kid," sighed Joe. "No, sir; it makes a crazy fool of me whenever I do. Why should I a heaved a bottle at that pore devil? Why should I a got sore because he was half wild about Johnny Hard? I should of shook his hand; yes, sir, old kid, I should of gone up and shook the hand of Black Jean and said, 'Boy, I know how you feel, and you got my sympathy.' But I had to go crazy mad and start a bum's rush on the pore devil. I'm a fool to drink hard licker, Matt, I'm tellin' you. But I guess I'm a fool anyway. Always have been. Always will be. Just a born crazy fool. Just born to be a fool and have troubles—that's old Joe Beedy."

He stopped and sighed so mournfully that Madam Odile set down by him, put her arm around his shoulder, and patted his cheek. She crooned over and over, "Moan pauvray peteet garson"; and then she shook her head at me and said, "Tsst! Cognac tray mal pour luee." I told her I thought it was, too, and that we'd been better off if we'd spent the evening drinking her vin roosh. But we hadn't, and Joe was certainly far gone now.

"Nothin' but trouble, that's Joe Beedy." He pulled himself away from Madam Odile and went on talking to me. "Matt, old kid, I never let you talk about my cousins who live in your Kansas neighborhood. Never would. Know why? I'll tell you. Tell you now. Got to. Goin' to the damn war deman matin. Never come back. Never will. I know, old kid."

"Oh, boy, I was nuts about that girl. Me, I'd been brung up in K. C., and I'd never knowed one like 'er.

Here she come to my folks—there she was one night when I come home from the barns. Fresh and bright-lookin'. Corn-fed for fair. And such a stack of goldy-red hair. A reg'lar little sunshine head, savvy voo. Big gray eyes. And that honest, corn-fed complexion. And her laugh—well, I thought she was too gay for me at first. Then I saw that she had her sad spells, too, and it was then I fell for her hard. That was the first Sunday night. We'd been havin' a grand good time, and I got to lovin' her, and, oh, boy, she fell hard for me—she was the kind that'd fall hard—but all of a sudden she broke away and busted into the saddest fit of cryin' I'd ever heard. That got me, old kid. I was hers."

Joe's voice had grown more mournfully sentimental all the time, and I was feeling so sadly sympathetic myself that I could feel my eyes was getting wet, and I knowed I would cry if I took just one more drink of vin roosh. So I didn't join Joe as he downed his glass, but waited for him to go on. He straightened up, and now his voice had a hard and reckless sound.

"No use stringin' it out. That was the same old story for me. I thought I'd found somebody to tie to at last. But I was a damn fool.

"She never said why it was, but she declared she could only work in K. C. for a month or so, for then she was goin' up to Chi or down to St. Louie. She got herself a job as a biscuit-shooter in a Main Street chophouse and went on boardin' with my folks. She fell hard for me, and I knowed it. She'd go out with me to the parks, the shows, the dances, and all the rest of it. She wanted to. But every so often she'd have one of them cryin' spells and try to hold off, declarin' again she'd soon have to leave old K. C. And me tryin' not to see anything

wrong. Sure I was understandin' and sympathetic. Feelin' she just had a kind of natural sadness, like I did. And then——"

Joe broke into his story with a string of half-hysterical cussing.

"Well, no use ravin' about it. One day she was gone. Just like that! Not a word. And me left half nuts. Oh, boy, I'll say I was!

"I looked all over K. C. for her, and I had to give up she was gone. Then I got sick of the old burg, of my folks and everything, and I started out hoboin'. I wound up a year later in Chi. And there I found her.

"Know where? Figger now! In a Salvation Army meetin'! Yeah, she had on the uniform, and I could tell by the shine in her eyes that she was all for Jeezus, and it was all off with me.

"But it wouldn't of been. No, she'd a took me and tried to converted me, I guess, but she'd got it into her head that she had to deny herself everything of the world. What she said herself. You see, old kid, she'd had a baby; the Army'd took care of her and found a home for the kid; and they certainly had made a Chrischun woman out of her! Me, I was out of it, though I could still see—but what was the use?

"She was out of that Kansas country of yours. Her folks lived next to my cousins. Some young Methodist scissor bill had got the best of her, give her some money, and run her out. I've thought many the time you might know—could tell—but, oh, Jeezus, I've had enough of it! If I was to know, all I'd think about would be to get him even if he was my own brother—and what's the use? Trouble enough. Why look for it? But maybe you did know her, old kid—Sadie Nixon, huh? Juh ever know one

of that name? Oh, hell—don't tell me. Oughta never blabbed all this. What'sa use? Makin' trouble. And old Joe Beedy's had too much—too much——”

I had knowed it was coming! Something had told me; and at every one of Joe's last words I had felt like chunks of ice was being dropped down my back. And when he said her name and suddenly began to turn sick and would have keeled over only Odile held him up, I lost my head and I don't remember what I did until I was in my billet and rolled in my blankets staring as soberly as I ever had in my life out into the thick dark.

Staring out into the thick dark. Where the fiery face of the Old Nick himself loomed and leered before me for the first time since that night at Bordaïre!

Oh, I was a lost soul! I knew it well when the Old Nick disappeared into a smoky red cloud and I saw in his place the past that I had forgot, saw it in awful images of hell-fire. Oh, I was one of the damned!

For hours, it seemed like, I laid and shuddered as bad as I had when I was a boy and would have to set and listen to the exhortations of powerful revivalists while their pictures of hell burned my mind. The awful spell lasted until I broke into a cold sweat and turned numb and weak from head to foot. Then I sunk into a kind of daze and the words of the army song went to pounding crazily through my head: “You'll never get well this side of hell—you're in the army now—you'll never get well this side of hell—you're in the army now—you'll never get well this side of hell—this side of hell——”

And they kept on pounding in an eery, mourning beat until I sunk into a nightmarish sleep.

IX

STRIPES



ELL, goodbye, old kid. You'll prob'ly be on your way to the front yourself before long. Maybe you'll get to my outfit. Nobody can tell nothin' about this man's war. Anyhow, you go on and win yourself a home with Odile till you do. She's a good old gal, fine as they make 'em. She likes you, and you ought to win out. Well, if I don't see you again here, maybe my luck'll change and we'll meet up in K. C. when it's fini la gear. Be good, old kid. So long."

I could not, to save my soul, look Joe in the eye when we shook hands. And I could hardly say a word, either. He was still shaky and sick from the Battle of Cognac Hill, and I was all in from the terrible night I'd had. It was a miserable goodbye.

Then he fell in; the bunch counted off; they marched in a column of squads down the street that led to the square; and when what was left of us fell in for the march to the drill-field, the street somehow seemed as empty and quiet as a graveyard.

The whole day I was sick at my stomach and miserable everywhere else. I didn't have any spirit for even the bayonet fighting. Everything in the army life seemed dreary and disgusting. I tried to cheer myself up by thinking how patriotic and resigned I was, but there wasn't anything to it today. The hours dragged and dragged; and all the time my mind kept tormenting itself about Sade

Nixon and poor old Joe, and about the vision of the Old Nick that had come the night before, with his threat of eternal damnation.

All the day I couldn't get rid of a sickening despair over everything. When I'd force myself to quit thinking about Joe Beedy, Sade Nixon, and the Old Nick, it was only to have the words of the army song pound through my head—"You'll never get well this side of hell—this side of hell——" Or it was to wonder how soon the rest of us privates would be sent to the front. And, though I had resigned myself to parting from Joe and soldiering according to orders here on the drill-field, I couldn't feel resigned at the idea of going to the front by myself. The way I was today a solemn and sure presentiment come to me that if I ever got to the front, I'd never last an hour. I could feel the certainty of it clean through my bones. I'd feel that solemn and sure presentiment; and then my past of sin would rise up in black pictures; and then I'd hear the Old Nick himself threatening eternal punishment. My time was close to taste the unsaved's eternal feast of fire, as the revivalists used to say. I was lost.

I tried to get the old feeling about how safe it was on the line and about the Boches being such cowards, as I plugged away in the bayonet fighting. But it was no use. The presentiment of evil smothered the feeling down.

I tried to think I might yet repent, that by some miracle I might find the religion I'd been brung up to. But that was no use, either. I knowed I had digged a pit for myself; I was down where no Light would come; and I'd need a long, toilsome time of trial before I could ever hope for the Light.

I tried to laugh and joke with the other soldiers, but they had all been drinking a lot the night before, and they

were gloomy over the company breaking up, besides. So they only made me feel worse off than ever.

That day certainly was a holy terror; and it promised that every day and night would be likewise, until I should come to an early end at the front and my soul cast into eternal torment.

Well, it is very probable every day and night would have been likewise, and that I'd have let all holts go and gone to the front without a struggle, and I'd have come to an early end there and gone to eternal torment, if it hadn't been for Madam Odile.

I'd promised myself that as far as I was concerned, she should go on being loyal to Joe; but that night we had a poor mess of nothing but corn Willy slum, and I was too dry in the mouth and sick at the stomach to eat much of it; so, after setting lonesomely in my billet for a while, I drug myself over to Odile's and asked her to cook me a couple of eggs and give me some vin roosh and Frog bread.

She set and watched me eat the eggs. She wasn't saying anything, but she lifted her apron and wiped her eyes once in a while, as she was still mighty sad about Joe. I didn't say much, either, but just ate slowly, until the wine seemed to make the eggs taste fairly good; and finally my appetite began to rise up again; and by the time the bottle of wine was finished, I'd eaten half of the big loaf of bread and a good chunk of sweet butter.

"Bon appetite, peteet papa!" said Madam Odile, with a sad smile.

"Oui, madam," I sighed. "I'm better now. Pa see mal, savvy voo."

"Oncore de vin roosh, peteet papa?"

I was shaking my head, reaching in my pocket for the

francs to pay for the supper, just ready to get up and go, when she asked that. I settled back and studied her for a minute. Odile wasn't quite so sad now, as she was smiling more. She looked down; then, without raising her head, she looked up at me and looked away again, all in a second.

I had lit a cigarette. All of a sudden the warm smoke tasted good as I drew it into my mouth. And the big apple-tree looked good, with the soft, gold light of the setting sun swimming through its leaves. And I felt cool and comfortable here in the shade of Madam Odile's kitchen yard. And there was Madam Odile herself—well, she might be overly plump, and she was no spring chicken, but she had a soft, curving shape that wasn't so bad to look at, and her eyes were bright as a madamozel's. And Joe had said himself—and I could make it, for she knowed I was getting money from home—oh, lordy! was I going to let myself be tempted still farther into the pit? But I couldn't be any more lost than I was; I might as well let 'er go Gallagher and get the most out of everything before I was sent to the front and come to my early end.

"Oncore, seel voo play, madam," I said.

Odile was gone an extra long time after the vin roosh. I set there on the bench, slouched down, my hands stuck in my britches pockets, and my head bent so that I was looking straight at my feet. My legs were stretched out, my heels were together on a crack in the red tiles, and I was spreading my toes out as far as they would go, and then clicking them together over the crack. Out and back. Out and back. Zwish. Click. Zwish. Click. I didn't want to get to figuring anything out, and doing this helped me not to.

The shadow from the kitchen and the L smokehouse was getting pretty long. The light was dimming. Soon the sun would go down and the rustle of the leaves of the apple tree would grow louder as the evening breeze freshened along.

And what would I be doing then? Supping away at a glass of cool and tasty red wine. Looking at Madam Odile and talking to her sadly about Joe Beedy. Would I now? Oh, thunder! It was hard to tell. A shiver run up my back as I could hear Joe telling that story again. Well, I would. I'd talk sadly about Joe; and after the bottle was drunk I'd go to my billet bed like I ought to; and maybe I'd have a good sleep and not see the grinning face of the Old Nick any more.

I certainly had to snap out of it and get back to myself again. Be the hero in my company that I was. Be patriotic and resigned to the army orders. What I'd done when I was a fool farmer kid back in Kansas couldn't be helped. If that and the times since had been enough to make me lose my immortal soul, why, it couldn't be helped. I expected Pa was right; his Hardshell doctrine of predestination was a true one; it was foreordained and predestinated that I should sin and never see the Light, and that I should burn in fire eternal when I come to my end. But there I was, figuring things out again.

Zwish. Click. Zwish. Click. Back and forth over the crack in the tiles slid the toes of my shoes, and me slouched down, with my hands in my pockets, and staring straight at my feet.

The sun went down. There was a sudden rustle in the apple tree. A breeze fanned my face. The light turned gray and the air was cool.

I'd be following Joe Beedy before long now. I certainly

would. Every evening we got the Paris American papers. They told us the Americans were fighting harder than ever to drive the Boches back. They would need more replacements right along. And certainly Private Parvin Mattock's time would come in less than a month. I felt that powerful presentiment again. I felt it clean through my bones that I'd come to an early end——

"Ah, peteet papa! Vaseel!"

And there was Madam Odile setting a bottle down on the table. And blamed if it wasn't champagne water.

"Present pour voo, peteet papa."

"Say, Odile, you're all right. Mercy, madam. Mercy, bokoo!"

I smiled up at Odile, and then I almost fell off the bench. For she had put on another dress, a fancy, red-colored one that she had hardly ever worn before; she had done up her hair again, and she had powdered and perfumed herself until she looked almost pretty there in the growing shadows, and she smelled like a bunch of roses.

A cheerful warm feeling come over me. Yes, I thought, figuring mighty fast, I'd certainly come to an early end at the front, and I'd be a fool if I didn't let all holts go and get as much out of life as I could while I had the chance. I certainly would. It wasn't right, of course, and I hadn't ought—but, oh, thunder, Odile was setting herself down on the bench as close to me as she could get; and she really seemed pretty now, and she could cook so blamed good; and I was too weak to struggle and fight. I couldn't help but give in. And there I was again.

If I could have stopped to figure it out then, I might have seen and known all that this would bring about. But I didn't stop to figure, so I never had any idea. Tak-

ing up with Odile just seemed like something that would make life pleasanter until I would have to go to the front. I grabbed the chance because I had the presentiment of an early end and felt my soul was lost anyhow. I'd be a fool to struggle and fight. I never figured it out, so I never thought there'd be any more to it.

So there I was, without the least idea of what was going to happen from my taking up with Madam Odile. Sometimes I get to thinking that it is almost mysterious the way things happen. You can figure out the right thing to do and then do it because it is right, and probably nothing will come of it at all. Then again you can do something just because you took a sudden notion to do it, and probably it will make a big change in your life, one you had never figured on a minute. I have tried to think why it is, and it certainly seems like a mystery. There I was, taking up with Madam Odile without hardly figuring on it a minute, spending the last of the money Pa had sent me on a new dress for her, and not seeing that any more than some good meals and pleasant times would come of it. Never dreaming that her being a good friend of Madam Rose, and Madam Rose being jealous about Johnny Hard would be mixed in it at all. Well, I had never dreamed, either, that just me taking a notion to plague Black Jean with some joking talk about Johnny Hard and Junie Tadousac would finally lead to anything serious. I was innocent in that and I just set here innocently with Odile and promised to buy her a new dress, while the night come on, and I sipped the last of the champagne water, and the leaves of the apple tree whispered out in the dark.

And for the next four days I was just as innocent. Each morning I plodded with the rest of the busted company to the drill-field. Every forenoon I would plug away

in the setting-up exercises and the close-order drills, feeling tough as anybody about our short company-front and about the file-closers' rank being about filled with corporals who had lost their squads. At noontime it was eat mess in the woods, smoke and rest and talk. The noon-time talk wasn't so lively and joking any more; we would wonder what outfits the other men had gone to, where they'd be fighting, and how soon the rest of us privates would be sent to the front. Each afternoon I tried to rouse my spirits in the bayonet fighting and dragged myself through a tedious two hours of the headachy deploying-drill. And every hot late afternoon I sweated through the hike back to Houel. The marching column raised a fog of dust these dry July days, Sometimes it was sultry and still, and then there was a summer mist over the farthest fields of turning grain and where the poplars of the Saguenay road appeared to come together in a green line. Then the farmyards were quiet except for the drowsy grunts of loafing hogs and the peevish clucks of mother hens. Young fruit was in the trees. The gardens and vineyards were a smother of green leaves. The summer of this Touraine country was coming along.

And I just kept soldiering along, trying to be patriotic and resigned, but still I was troubled by that presentiment. It would never leave me except when I was with Madam Odile, and I took it as a solemn warning. I thought and thought, but everything seemed hopeless. When my time come, I'd simply have to mind the orders and go to the front with the rest of the privates. I could see as plain as day that it had to be.

Then, on Black Jean's last night in Houel the things that I had never figured on or even dreamed about began to happen.

From all that I was able to understand in Odile's talk about it afterwards, it appeared that Black Jean had got an earful of neighborhood gossip no sooner than he had landed in Houel. But Junie had convinced him that she would never dream of looking at any other man than him. And all had been fine between them until that night of the cognac party, when he took my joshing for the sober truth. His suspicions had been stirred up ever since.

Still, Black Jean would probably have gone back to the front without doing any more than to act fierce and suspicious if it hadn't been for Madam Rose. She was very handsome and knowed it, and she had been kind to Johnny Hard right from the first. And she had got "bokoo jealous," as Odile said, when she saw he was falling for the little Tadousac madamozel. So on this last night she got Black Jean into her café and fed him cognac until she thought he was ripe for a good lie or two; and she worked him into a rage that she thought would make him go after Junie and throw such a scare into her that she'd never dare to look at Johnny Hard again.

She never imagined that Black Jean would tackle an American officer, but that was where she was wrong, for he got that idea in his head, and she couldn't argue it out. He stayed right in the Red Bull till after taps, waiting for Johnny Hard to show up, shoving Madam Rose out of his way when she tried to make him get.

When our company commander showed up, Black Jean slapped his face.

Johnny Hard stripped off his blouse and invited the jealous fool of a sergeant out into the back yard.

The first I knowed of the trouble, of course, was when Madam Rose came hammering at Odile's; and the two women clawed around me till I understood there was

trouble of some kind in the back yard of the Red Bull; and then I rambled across the street, into a narrow alley for a few steps, and I was at the yard wall.

It was easy to climb on account of many stones being loose. One second and I was looking over the top. The yard was narrow and long, and the moon was low, so that the shadow of the café building made it dark where two men were fighting. In a close clinch they swung over to the wall, and then I saw who they were. Right under me Johnny Hard's face come back until he was looking almost straight up into my eyes. Black Jean's big hand was clutching around his throat. The Frog was growling like a fighting bull, but not a sound came from Johnny Hard. His eyes were bulging and staring, and his two hands were gripping at Black Jean's wrist. I just stared at the sight. I couldn't move a muscle. Black Jean's growl rose higher, and with his right fist he smashed the lieutenant in the jaw. It was a fool trick, for his own grip was shaken by the lick; and Johnny Hard made a lunging twist to one side and brought his knee up into the sergeant's groin. Black Jean let out a wild groan then, dropped his hands, and staggered back. And as he did, Johnny Hard socked him on the chin and spread him flat.

But it was only for a second or two that Johnny Hard stood there, looking down at the groaning sergeant; his black hair showing a fierce tangle, even in the dark, his shirt sleeves ripped and hanging in tatters from the elbows, the front of his shirt tore open all the way down, and the white undershirt puffing up as his chest heaved. His feet were spraddled out, and he stood swaying, with his chin tucked down like he was still half dazed from the choking—and his head snapped up, but before he could make another move, Black Jean was back on his feet.

He was back with a turn, one leap, and a lunging rush. Johnny Hard swung for his jaw—missed—and Black Jean's foot flipped up like someone had throwed it and thudded into the lieutenant's belly. And now it was Johnny Hard's turn to go down groaning, with Black Jean on top of him.

They rolled, scrambled, heaved up half-way to their feet, thumped down, jerked and kicked, groaned, wheezed and sighed, all over the ground of the narrow yard; and all I could see was the tumbling tangle of white splotches made by their faces and arms, and by their bodies where their shirts were ripped away. Black Jean's blue uniform showed up more in the dark; and wherever I saw that paler-looking shape roll to the top, and saw a white fist rise up from it and hammer back down with a fleshy smack, I would feel a sick shiver of sympathy all through my insides. And gradually it began to come on me that I should jump over the wall and help my company commander out. But I kept hoping to see Johnny Hard fight to his feet, and I kept waiting for what would look like a better time to pitch in; and, finally, just when I was about decided, the two of them rolled with a heavy bump into the wall, and Johnny Hard leaped up and back. He was free.

Black Jean, staggering like he was dizzy, sprang up after him. Johnny Hard waited—and I was thinking, "Lordy, oh, lordy, why *don't* he cut loose? Why *don't* he swing now?"—but he waited until the big Frog sergeant was fair on his feet, then he set himself, chopped his right fist out, and Black Jean went down, and stayed down.

Johnny Hard walked crookedly over to the well, drawed a bucket of water, carried it back, and sloshed some in Black Jean's face. In a little bit he set up.

"You got enough?" said Johnny Hard.

Black Jean groaned out something that sounded like a "Oui," and Johnny Hard helped him up. And he certainly was tame when he came to himself.

"Sacree!" he said to Johnny Hard. "Grand boxay! Voo manifique, lieutenant!"

"You give me the hardest battle I ever had," said Johnny Hard. "Shake."

But all of a sudden Black Jean grabbed himself by the forehead and began to groan.

"Ah, lieutenant! What 'ave you win? What 'ave I lose? Junie—moan aime. Ah—alor—selah gear! Seh feenish for zis sergeant see. May—hom!"

"Fini?" said Johnny Hard. "I hope to spit in your ear you're not. I admit I chased your Jane some, but I'm off her now, see. No dame's worth a couple of good guys battlin' over. Tray mal, savvy, soldier? I'm off Junie Tadousac, get me? When it's fini la gear she'll be here for you just like she is now. I'll stick to the Red Bull. You're a damn good soldier. So'm I. Shake hands."

"Hom!" was all Black Jean could say. "Moan brave lieutenant!"

Well, and if they didn't go and shake hands after that terrible fight! I was so surprised that I about fell off the wall. But I caught myself, and squeezed down close against the stones until the two of them disappeared into the shadows at the back of the café. Then I slid back down to the ground. And there I faced Madam Odile. She told me Madam Rose had run to the Busons, and she tried to tell me a lot more, talking in a half-hysterical way, like women will at an exciting time, but I rushed her right back over to her house. I didn't want to be mixed up in this business, and I finally made her understand

she'd better keep out of it too, or she'd get into trouble with the American regulations, and no mistake.

But I was mixed up in it, and up to my neck, too, before everything was done. The very next evening Sergeant Shevlin took me out to one side and asked me what I knowed. I told him very frankly and asked him what he'd heard from the Frog gossip, but the sergeant cut me mighty short.

"That's the only trouble," he said, frowning at me. "It's the damn Frog gossip. If Dill gets on to this, it's good night for Johnny Hard. But he got Madam Rose shut up, the Busons'll keep quiet, and it's up to you to hush the clapper of that fat madam of yours, see. Damn that cognac party. I was the nuts for pullin' it, and you, you big Kansas Hoosier, was the nuts for makin' them rummy wise cracks to Sergeant Buson. Selah gear pa bon. Well, for Chri' sake try to use your head, for once in your life. Got a match?"

I swore that I would; and I certainly intended to, or I wouldn't have give Madam Odile such a lecture about keeping quiet herself. And if it had only been me, I know that Lieutenant Dill would never have got wind of the story in the first place. But he did get wind of it from somebody, and he also heard that I knowed something about the trouble between the company commander and Black Jean.

"Private Mattock, report at my quarters after mess," he ordered one night, when we had just finished standing retreat.

Of course I had to do it, though I hated to like fury, for I had a sneaking suspicion of what he wanted to see me privately about.

It was the first time that I had reported to an officer this

way since the time in Bordaïre when Johnny Hard hauled me out of court martial charges for battling the engineers. And when I stepped into Lieutenant Dill's billet room I felt again the awful sinking feeling that I'd known on that other time. I saluted without looking down, made myself stand at attention, and gazed over the lieutenant's round, blond head at the green wall-paper, a shelf with a stack of books on it, a trench coat hanging at one end of the shelf, and at the heavy curtain over the window, which was flushed from the reddish light of the setting sun; and I could feel the red come to my face as I held my breath and waited; waited for this chubby little lieutenant, who had a great pull with the colonel, even if he was a rotten drill-field officer, waited for him to ask me—oh, I could feel in my bones what was coming!—about Black Jean and Johnny Hard.

"Stand at ease."

The command was spoken in such a low, soft voice that I looked down with surprise. And I simply stared when I saw that the lieutenant had a smile on his face. Yes, sir, the corners of Lieutenant Dill's mouth, which drooped down usually, were lifted in a smile, and his pudgy cheeks were puffed out more than ever. And I felt myself warm up to him; I couldn't help it; no officer had ever spoken so soft to me before, or smiled at me, either. And I could feel a grin come over my own face.

"Stand at ease. That's it. I only called you here for a little friendly talk. It's to be confidential. Understand? A little talk, and we shall both keep it to ourselves."

The corners of his mouth drooped again as he gave me a shrewd look. I couldn't think of a thing to say, so I just grinned some more; and then the lieutenant leaned

back in his chair, blinked a few times, and smiled again like he thought I was all right.

"I wished to inform you," he went on, in the friendliest voice imaginable, "that eight corporals and one sergeant are to be reduced to privates before the next replacements leave for the front. That means promotions for some of you, of course. I shall select three. I called you here, Private Mattock, for a little confidential talk, in the course of which I hope to be satisfied that you are fit for the responsibilities of a non-commissioned officer."

I like to have fell over at that, and I could feel my face flushing up and my grin spreading until I must have looked tickled half to death. So many thoughts and feelings rose up in my head and mixed and whirled around that it was all I could do—just flush and grin. First, I was tickled because I wasn't to be asked about Johnny Hard, and next I was just tickled silly at the idea of getting to be a corporal, and not figuring or working or being duty-struck for the stripes at all, but just simply having them handed to me on a platter; and then I was tickled to think the orders wouldn't be for me to go to the front now, not that I didn't want to go, but what use would it be to my country when I was sure to come to an early end as soon as I got there; and then there was Odile——

"Now answer my questions."

Still using his soft, low voice, the lieutenant asked me a bunch of questions about the different drills; and I reared right up and snapped the answers back any way I thought of them, for I'd heard Johnny Hard tell the non-coms time and again that they always wanted to act sure, whether they were or not; and I knowed I was

balling some of the answers up, but the lieutenant passed them over, or else he didn't know himself; but I was too flushed and excited to care, just so——

"And now——" The lieutenant's voice got a regular purr in it. "The—eh—most important question of all. How do you conceive—how about your duty to your superior officers?"

"Sir, I'd obey 'em and stick up for 'em no matter what it was!" I answered right back.

"Even if one ordered you to take your squad into certain death—say a machine-gun nest?"

"Yes, sir, every time."

"And—now heed this—if you witnessed a—say a flagrant violation of the regulations by—eh—your company commander, would you report?"

The lieutenant stammered so over that question that I got flustered myself, and hemmed and hawed around until it seemed like I had to say something.

"Well, sir, I guess I hardly wouldn't."

"That's no answer!" The lieutenant's face turned colicky and his eyes squinted in a frown as he glanced up sharply. "Now listen. Surely you understand me. I'm not asking you to tell me anything now. But I want a flat answer to my question. If you witnessed your company commander in, say, a brawl with an enlisted man, or with a French civilian, or with an—eh—enlisted man in the French army, would you tell the exact truth—the exact truth, mind—to—to any officer who questioned you about it?"

I could see by the way Lieutenant Dill was tightening his mouth and frowning that this was the main question he'd wanted to ask me; and I wished with all my soul that I could have time to figure out just what I ought to say

back; but I didn't have time, I didn't have time to figure, and there he was, an officer who could make me a corporal, and I could only think it was my duty to give the answer I knowed he'd think was right. For no matter what else he was, there he was now, the officer who could make me a corporal. And if I was to be made a corporal by him, if I was to get the stripes that would make me a non-commissioned officer and which would keep me from coming to an early end, I'd have to say—I'd have to say—and so I said it: "Yes, sir. I'd do my duty and what was right. I'd tell everything if I was asked by an officer to do it."

THOUGHTS OF HOME



It was the first Saturday afternoon in August. For ten days, ever since the last outfit of privates had been sent to the front, the officers of the 185th Infantry had been organizing what they called "training cads." This was the training cad of each company: first sergeant, company clerk, and two buglers; supply sergeant and four mechanics; mess sergeant and four cooks; eight duty sergeants and twenty-eight corporals.

The corporals who had been busted by Johnny Hard and sent to the front were all from a bunch that had been made by Captain Cornwall at Camp Mills. Tony Campanero was one of them, and the others were of the same serious, studious kind, not overly husky or hard-boiled, neither. Sergeant White of the 4th Platoon was busted, too, and that overgrown, fat-faced, bull-necked corporal of a Pinky Funke was promoted to his place. The new corporals in the 1st Platoon were Pete Widdy, Horse Karsak, and I, Parvin Mattock. Doc Makin had been made a cook, when Tub Hoffman was busted. It was the surprise of Doc's life, as he had fully expected to be sent to the front, being too generally sunshiny, happy-go-lucky, and good-natured to be a corporal; and he had tried to argue it out with Johnny Hard, declaring that he had been a chiropractor doctor in private life, which didn't fit him for the job of army cook at all; but the lieutenant had

only grinned and said we was all too fond of his smiles, singing, and banjo-picking to lose them, and the only way we could keep him was as a cook. So every morning and night there was old Doc at the mess table, his head shining pink-like through the few blond hairs he had left, his pale gray eyes glancing brightly to the right and left, his lower lip pursed in the middle and bulging down in his perpetual smile, so that his gold teeth gleamed out. I was glad Doc had been kept back with the training cad, as he was good company when I had spent all my pay-day and didn't have anything to do but join the gang at the kitchen and harmonize for a while.

For me the sun was shining very brightly again. I was doing handsomer in the army than I had ever hardly dared to dream. I got along real well in my corporal's position after I had begun to get used to its responsibilities, and gradually stopped worrying about whether Lieutenant Dill was going to mix me in his quarrel with Johnny Hard. But he hadn't said any more to me about what I would report on an officer fighting with an enlisted man of the Frog army. He hadn't even said another word that evening; when I had told him that I would consider myself in duty bound to report it, he had given me just one shrewd stare, then he looked at the flushed curtain for a good while, screwing his face into his colicky frown and licking his lips as he did; and then he had told me he thought I would do and to get out. I was tickled all over, for the presentiment was gone, and I felt a glorious change in every way. Still, for some reason I had felt uncomfortable until I saw that nobody was thinking anything wrong about me. The new sergeant, Pinky Funke, was the only one who made any sneering remarks about my promotion; and everybody knowed that this over-

grown Dutch ignoramus was only sore because he wanted to win a home with Odile and had hoped to see me go to the front and leave the way clear. He didn't have a chance now, for he was a thick-legged lummoX who was so tubby that his cartridge belt always bowed down under his stomach, and, besides, most of his pay-day was tied up in allotments to his pa and ma.

But taking it all in all, I got on real well. The drill period was cut down an hour a day until the replacement troops should come in, and a lot of our time on the drill-field was taken up with book-soldiering. In the mornings we exercised, and each corporal took a turn at drilling a squad of other corporals. In the afternoons all of us non-coms would set in a circle around Johnny Hard and Lieutenant Bucoda, as Lieutenant Dill hardly ever came to the drill-field any more. Under the officers' eyes we would take automatic rifles apart and assemble them again, do the same thing with hand and rifle grenades, the automatic pistol and the Springfield, and study and answer questions about musketry and the Frog deploying-drill. This book-soldiering discouraged me a good deal the first few days I was a corporal, as Johnny Hard simply snorted at the way I got some of the questions tangled up; and I knowed I could never help it, for I simply wasn't able to study a drill book without its ideas getting so balled up in my mind that my head would throb and ache, and the harder I studied and figured, the more everything would get into a muss. I guess the only thing that saved me was my rip-roaring bayonet fighting. For one afternoon Johnny Hard called me out to one side, sized me up from top to bottom, grinned his one-sided grin, and said, "Mattock, you're a rotten drill-book corporal, but you have a big chin, a bully bass voice, and a savage frown. And

you certainly can knock hell out of the dummies. There's just one job for you, and that's bayonet instructor. You'll be under Sergeant Funke. Now get the commands for bayonet fightin' straight in your head, or Jeezus help you!"

"Yes, sir."

I felt so good over getting the one instructor's job that I was sure I could handle, and the one I liked best of all, that I didn't feel a particle sore over his slur about what a rotten drill-book corporal I was. I could have explained that it wasn't my fault, that I had been slow at school when I was a boy and had not finished the eighth grade until I was past seventeen, but I didn't try to explain, as I was too tickled to get a place as bayonet instructor to care what the reason was. The only drawback was that I'd have to be under that overgrown tub of a Sergeant Funke. But that was just the old army again, and I figured I'd get along with him if I flattered him enough, he was that simple-minded.

So, taking it all in all, I had done real well. And here I was this drowsy, hot Saturday afternoon, bathed and shaved up, dressed in a new uniform, a pair of new web wrap leggings, a new whipcord overseas cap, and my russet shoes, which shone with a fine ox-blood polish. I'd had another twenty-five dollars from Pa. Pay-day was just around the corner, too. And Odile had simply raved about my looks in the new outfit. "Ah, peteet papa—see grand—see—beau—ah, peteet papa!" Of course I could look in her big mirror and see that my back muscles made me appear some stooped, that my chin was pretty heavy, that my eyes were not any too big and handsome, though they could look pretty shrewd when I gazed sideways, and that my mouth was kind of loose because I was always trying

to appear good-natured—I always knew I was never anything for looks, and would josh about my cowlicks and my snub nose myself, but it made me feel mighty good to know that Odile thought I was handsome, anyway. That fatty of a Funke would have to go some if he beat my time.

Yes, sir, I had done real well, I thought, as I laid on my back in the grass of the Houel park, drowsed in the shade, gazed up at the little patches of blue sky that showed through the green of the oak leaves, just rested myself, and thought of the supper that Odile would have for me tonight. I could only ask a few more things to make me feel that I was getting on perfectly fine. If I could only keep from bothering myself by thinking about Lieutenant Dill and Johnny Hard every once in a while. If I could only get shed of the crazy worries about Joe Beedy. If I was only sure that I could get along with Sergeant Funke and would never lose my corporal's stripes. Still, I felt pretty well off and I could lay in the shady grass and think most of the time about pleasant things.

I'd simply have to write some letters home tomorrow. This was the first Saturday afternoon off I'd had in France, and tomorrow I wouldn't have to do any cleaning up. I would only have to shave, and march with the company to church services. There'd be plenty of time to write letters.

It had been three weeks since I'd written home. And then only miserable short letters. I simply hadn't been able to write while I was so stirred up about going to the front; then there was that torment Joe Beedy's story had throwed me into; and at last the excitement of getting to be a corporal. But now I was growing into the humor to write some good letters.

I could shut my eyes and see Ma opening a letter with "Corporal Parvin Mattock" at the bottom; and then the dear old lady would wipe her specs and take a second look to make sure; and then she would go out a calling to Pa, "My own only big old boy has done so good in the army he's been made a corporal, Pa! Ain't we proud 'of him, though?" And I could see Pa looking at the letter in his sober way, holding it out and squinting on account of his far sight, and then that slow smile coming over his face as he said, "Well, shucks, now! That boy of your'n shore is a caution. I bet he didn't come by it honest." He'd josh Ma that way, and she'd huff up and tell him not to get smart, but he'd just go on plaguing her, though he'd be every bit as proud as she was.

Yes, sir, I certainly must write my good old folks a fine letter tomorrow.

I could see the Snodgrasses, too, reading a letter to Elsie in which I told all about it. Rev. Snodgrass would probably mention it in church, especially if I put in something about the willing sacrifices us soldiers was making to Almighty God; he might make a regular exhorting picture of me leading my squad into battle, fighting righteously against "the hosts of Hell," as he had called the Boche in a letter he wrote me. If I was to write the proper kind of letter to Elsie, he certainly would. That was a fine idea, and it gave me a lot of pleasure to dream about it. I just laid and nearly laughed out loud as I thought of the Clevisburg folks telling about Parvin Mattock, old Pleas Mattock's boy, who had got to be a corporal over in France and was leading his squad into battle. They'd talk about it at Bell's feed store, at the Ford garage, at Lane's hardware store, and Art Maple's grocery, and maybe the young folks would talk about it, too, at Harve Thresher's

confectionery. Maybe at last Lola Bandon would get to thinking I was a real hero and would write me a letter. Why she hadn't written to me yet, I could never figure out. If Elsie was——

"Hey, Matt, what's the big joke? What you grinnin' to yourself about? Boy, you're Jake, when you can go out and have such a good time all by your lonesome!"

It was Doc Makin, and I was so flustered to have him catch me grinning alone that way, I could only think to tell him that I was figuring about the warm old time I'd have with Madam Odile tonight.

"Oh, you heart-breaker!" laughed Doc, in his sunshiny way. "Forget it for a while, and let's ramble to the orderly room. Just heard over't the Y the mail's come in."

We rambled out of the park together, kidding one another as we walked along; him joshing me about the stand-in any corporal who got money from home could have with a madam like Odile; and me joshing him about how his "little woman," as he always spoke of his wife, must be having the time of her life, flirting with the slackers who had stayed at home in Niles, Michigan. I had always got along fine with Doc, as everybody did, and I had a pile of fun joshing with him until the mail was handed out by the bugler.

There were three letters and two packages for me. I felt mighty lucky, as I hadn't been in such a humor to get mail for months. My mind was mostly free from worry now, and it seemed wonderful to hear from home. When all the mail had been distributed, the crowd of corporals and sergeants spread out; some of them setting down on the curbs so's to read their letters right off; others walking slowly down the street, reading as they walked; and a few beating it straight for their billets. This last is what I did.

I tore open the packages as I hiked down past the Buson wall. One had two *Christian Advocates*, and the other was some sheet music songs. They were a great surprise, as I had never got anything like that before. I took a squint at the wrapper. The address was in a girl's handwriting I didn't recognize, and there was no name on the return address, but only the number and name of an apartment house in Kansas City. Then I noticed that one of the letters was addressed in the same handwriting. I figured and figured, but it was still a mystery. I was at the billet ladder by this time, and I hustled right on up, still figuring as I climbed. Another second, and I was setting on my blankets, tearing the mysterious letter open. I started to read it, and then I just set and stared and I caught myself grinning like a fool. But no wonder. The letter was from Lola Bandon.

Three snapshots had dropped out on the blankets, and every one of them was of her, too! In one she was walking down a street, in another she was stepping into a big automobile, and in another she was setting under a tree in some park; and how bright and grown-up and beautiful she looked in all of them! That kid of a Lola! By thunder! Writing from Kansas City! I missed half of the words, I read so fast.

She didn't know whether I'd want to hear from her or not, after what the Clevisburg folks had probably wrote me. But she had her side of it. She'd been simply stifling in that town. And when Uncle Pret had tried to hold her right to home after she'd graduated, she'd just rebelled. She was eighteen and she was absolutely tired of being treated like a baby by Elsie and the rest. So she had run off to Kansas City and got a good job with a perfectly splendid employer; and she'd found city life wasn't at all

like she'd been brought up to believe; for she was going to dances and shows and having a good time generally, and the city men all treated her wonderfully, especially her splendid employer. She hoped I was broad-minded enough to understand her, as she was proud to have a friend like me over in the war. She'd have written before if it hadn't been for Elsie. She'd love to hear from me if I could find time to write a line or two; and she was sending me some songs, in memory of the times we used to sing together.

Well, it was not at all a silly, mushy letter like I'd have expected a kid like Lola to write. I read it over and over; and then I looked and looked at the snapshots; and she appeared so lovely and gay that I must have spent fifteen minutes dreaming about our old times together, as I gazed and gazed at the pictures. The park picture was an especially pleasing one. She was setting on a stone, with her ankles crossed and her feet tucked back; her bare arms were down around her knees, with her hands folding a striped skirt tight against her ankles; and her head was turned down a little from the sunlight, so that she smiled sort of up at me from the picture. I got a sentimental feeling that if I had been there I could have set down by her, put my arm around her, and rested her head on my shoulder. As I read the letter over again, I was sure that I could. It wasn't mushy or silly, but I could read between the lines that she was wishing she had somebody like me to go out for good times with, instead of the weakly city slackers. Well, I'd write her a letter tomorrow that would let her know I wasn't so religious and strict any more myself. I laid back on the blankets and went to figuring the letter out. But I couldn't keep my eyes off the snapshots. I could hardly believe it yet. Little Lola Bandon off work-

ing, dancing and going to shows in Kansas City. Elsie's kid of a cousin!

At last I quieted myself down about her, and then I opened my other letters. One was from the old folks, and the other was from Elsie. They were about the same as usual: Ma was trying to bear up and be brave about her own only big old boy being away off overseas, fighting in the great war, and she was mighty proud of him. All of the Clevisburg women were proud of their menfolks who were in the war, and they were doing all they could in the Red Cross work and the drives. Elsie Snodgrass was about working herself sick. Pa was showing the strain of the farm work, but I wasn't to worry about him as he'd flesh up and feel better after the harvest. I must not forget the Lord and His laws, and He would be my best buckler and shield in the perils I met. Pa's letter was very short, as he said he was mighty busy and wasn't feeling peart as common; the crops were fine and the stock was doing well; and he'd send me another \$25.00 as soon as it was handy. Elsie's letter was sweet and serious, like hers always was, and told quite a little gossip about how she and the other Methodist girls were trying to do their duty in war work, so as to give their mite to the great cause. She was sending me some *Christian Advocates*, as she thought I'd enjoy seeing the old church paper.

But none of the letters said anything about Lola Bandon. I guessed they felt she had disgraced the Snodgrasses by running away to Kansas City, just as her mother before her had disgraced them by marrying a Swamp Creek Bandon. I knowed that was the way I'd have felt about it myself in the times before I was drafted in the army. But I had changed a lot. I certainly had, I decided, as I laid back on my blankets and gazed at the

snapshots. I had changed so that I could honestly believe that a girl might go to a city and work, and go out to dances and the theaters, and still not get to sinning, neither. I could believe that there was many a girl like that who would make as good and pure a wife for a man as the strictest Methodist girl would. Of course I'd never dare to write such an idea to Ma or Elsie, so I decided I'd just keep quiet about Lola. If they were so ashamed of her they wouldn't mention her in their letters, why, all right. I knowed where she was now, anyhow, and that was enough for me.

I spent a mighty pleasant hour of thinking about Lola, looking over her snapshots, reading between the lines of her letter, and imagining what all might happen if I was to keep my corporal's stripes, soldier on through the war, and be a real hero when I would be discharged from the army and go to see her in Kansas City. I'd certainly write her a good letter tomorrow and let her know I had got to liking to go out for good times myself. I laid on and mused and imagined about everything so pleasantly and comfortably that I didn't come out of it until I realized that it was getting late. The corporals and sergeants were stringing in for their mess kits. And I was a quarter of an hour late for Odile's supper.

She didn't scold me much, though, and she had an extra good supper, so I ought to have gone on and bragged on her in the style she liked so much. But I was in such a dreamy humor about home that I set and ate the sweet, juicy steak and sipped the flavory wine without hardly paying any attention to Odile at all. And I stayed in that humor when I was through and went to puffing contentedly on a cigarette. Odile set down by me and put her big arm around my neck. I scarcely noticed it, for my

mind was on the old home town and the old home folks. My thoughts kept rising far away and above Madam Odile, and I simply couldn't help it. I could see myself on a Saturday evening in the future, fresh home, still wearing my uniform, marching down the sidewalks to the Clevisburg depot, stopping now and then to tell somebody what I had seen and done in the war, then catching a train for the three-hour ride to Kansas City, and the next day taking Lola Bandon out for some good times. I could hardly keep from drawing her snapshots out of my blouse pocket and looking at them right before Madam Odile.

But I didn't, for pretty soon she went to acting snappish, wanting to know if I was *malad*, and so on; and that made me peevish; so when I heard the strains of harmonizing from the company kitchen, I told her that I was sick, so *bon* swear, and she would see me tomorrow, if I was feeling better.

Well, Doc Makin had his banjo out, and fifteen or twenty of the non-coms were ganged around him in the shade of the old barn that was used for a kitchen and a supply room. Pay-day was still around the corner, and about all the bunch could do tonight was to set around, argue, and harmonize. When I came up, Sergeant Mahler, the bombing-sergeant, Sergeant Shevlin, who was the chief automatic-rifle instructor, and Sergeant Funke, were in a hot argument about which was the most important at the front, bombs, automatic rifles, or bayonets. The corporals were chipping in with their say-sos, and I wanted to do it, too, but I couldn't bring myself to help out that loud-mouthed ignoramus of a Funke. He was making enough noise to win a dozen arguments anyway. So I just set and listened until Doc Makin went to picking his banjo and teased the bunch into harmonizing again.

Everybody got to going so well in it that I was moved to put up the price of a gallon of vin roosh to keep the good time moving; and then I went to my billet for the sheet music Lola had sent me; and we got such a wonderful kick out of one of the songs, which was called "How You Going to Keep Them Down on the Farm After They Have Seen Paree" that we all learned it and were harmonizing it until a good while after dark. I bought another gallon of vin roosh, and everybody slapped me on the back and said how big-hearted I was; and then we harmonized on some of the old songs; and it turned out to be one of the finest evenings I'd ever spent. Every once in a while I would miss poor old Joe's feeling tenor, and I'd be bothered by a sad thought or two about him, but I was really about as contented as anybody else when we broke up to go our billets.

I was contented, for I hadn't missed Sergeant Funke from the bunch, and had never had an idea that he would go to visit Odile while I was enjoying myself with harmonizing. I hadn't realized yet how miserably contemptible this wide-mouthed Dutchman actually was, or I'd never in the world have shown Lola's snapshots to the bunch while he was around and let on then, just for the fun of it, that she was my feeansay back home. I was innocent enough not to suspicion, but treated him like my other friends; and then he had to go and blab a lot of contemptible lies to Odile. And the next night, after I'd spent the whole afternoon figuring out a clever letter to write to Lola and was about worn out, it cost me an hour of coaxing and the price of a new pair of silk stockings before I could make Odile realize that Sergeant Funke was just a contemptible, overgrown liar of a Dutchman who couldn't be trusted about anything.

But tonight I never dreamed that he was up to such infernal mischief, and I was perfectly contented when I went to bed. I fell asleep without a worry on my mind, thinking nothing but pleasant thoughts of home.

XI

THE BATTLE OF PARIS



HERE I was in Paris, the famous city of France, where every A. E. F. soldier was crazier to go than any place else. Yes, sir, there was no mistake about it, I was right here in Paris, and for a minute I felt exactly like I used to when I was just a small boy and would wake up on Christmas morning. Paris, where everybody said the most wonderful madamozels in all the world was. Paris, where they drunk vin roosh and beer right out on the open street—and did even worse, as I had seen the first thing when us convoy non-coms drove in the night before. Paris, the most talked-about city in the world right now; and here was I, Parvin Mattock, of Clevisburg, Kansas, waking up right in the middle of it. Waking up in a big room of the Y. M. C. A. Hotel, and feeling just like I used to feel on Christmas morning.

Well, it seemed like everything had been working out in the best way imaginable for about a month now. If I had ordered it myself, I could not have asked for things to be better. From the time the first replacement draft of Montana soldiers had marched into Houel, I got along so fine in my corporal's position, and my personal affairs begun to look so bright, that I could only think the Almighty was with me at last.

I had even got the best of that loud-mouthed ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke. He had won a flock of

francs in the pay-day crap game, and right away of course he had bought a new hat and a new pair of shoes for Odile. I kept acting like I was his rival, and egged him on into spending every cent of his crap money on her; and it was simply killing, the way he would strut around like he had beat my time, when I had only egged him into spending all his money. I had lost all of my feelings for Odile after I begun to get such wonderful letters from Lola Bandon. Besides, when I saw she was the kind of a woman who would throw herself away on a tub of a lummoX like Sergeant Funke, I was sorry to think that Joe Beedy and I had ever lowered ourselves by having anything to do with her. It was good riddance to bad rubbish, as Ma used to say.

I was just as lucky in my corporal's work with the Montana men. It had been pretty tough going in the bayonet fighting, as Sergeant Funke would pick on me twice for every other corporal's once to demonstrate in the hand-to-hand fighting and disarming-exercises; and the Montana men were such a wild lot that they would forget the science and turn the demonstrations into what was regular fighting and rasseling. I still had a bad bruise behind my leg from the time a man of my squad who was called Missoula Red forgot the science and I set down on the stacking swivel of my rifle.

But just to show how good everything had worked out, this same Missoula Red had been the one to put the deploying-drill straight in my head. He was an old man, really, and he had dyed his gray hair red and registered as under thirty-one, so as to be caught in the draft. He had taken to me because I liked to hear his stories about the marvels of Montana geography. He told me about a place where there was a genuine bourbon springs bub-

bling up in a ten-mile patch of mint, making a perfect julep lake; about a mountain of telescope glass, which would make a deer fifty miles away appear to be right under your eyes; and about a place where everything was petrified, with petrified birds in the petrified trees singing sweet petrified songs. Of course they were all lies, and I soon got on to it, but I was good-natured and liked to listen to him. So finally we become serious friends, and he told me confidentially that he was a grandson of General Custer, who had invented this complicated deploying-drill. He had learned the drill at Grandpa's knee, he said, and he helped me take the squad through it day after day until even Johnny Hard thought I was a good corporal and sent me along in the non-com convoy when the replacements were headed for the front.

That had brung me a little trouble, for the black presentiment come back until we reached the combat division headquarters. But that very night we were in an airplane fight, and I come through it as good as anybody. I never even whimpered a word of prayer all the time we were in the bomb cellar, and when we were through fighting the airplanes and I had come out of the cellar again, I had about the proudest and most exalted feeling I'd ever knowed. I had been through a battle and lived up to the reputation of being a hero in my company. And when we left the replacements and headed back by way of Paris the next morning, I was still feeling exalted about the way I had come through the airplane fight.

And here I was in Paris. That was the beauty part of it. I had been doing real well, and this was my reward. And I could not help an humble religious feeling that at last I was in favor with the Almighty. And I made a vow

that I would try to be worthy from now on, turn over a new leaf, and go the way I should go again.

The soft mattress and the cool sheets still felt good, and I turned my face over in the feather pillow to try to doze off again. But it was no use. That Christmas feeling kept me awake; and then I went to thinking about the kind of Paris time the soldiers always talked about; and next I begun to argue that it wouldn't make any difference if I waited until I had left Paris to turn over a new leaf. I had been mired in sin for so long now that one day and night wouldn't make any real difference one way or the other. But my conscience was strong; and by the time I felt ready to get up, I was nearer to being a Christian American soldier again than I had been for months. Even if I was in Paris.

So I was in a very serious humor when I rose up and looked around the big room for the other Company F men of the convoy, Corporals Pete Widdy and Gabe Smith, and Sergeant Bloedel. The sergeant was nowhere to be seen, but the corporals were snoring away.

"Tenshun, there!" I yelled at Corporals Widdy and Smith. "Snap out of it and come to life!"

"Aw, lay off," growled Gabe. "Let a guy snooze."

"Shake it up and come on. Sergeant Bloedel and the others is up and gone already. Let's go eat."

"Up and gone, hell!" Gabe set up and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. "The sergeant and half of them other birds never slept here. Um—huh—wooe!—wot time zit?"

I made a Frog motion with my shoulders that meant I didn't know, as I had forgot to wind my wrist watch, It was true that some of the cots which had our non-

coms' packs on them looked like they hadn't been slept in. I was a little peeved for a second and forgot about my conscience. If I'd knowed the night before that Sergeant Bloedel was going out for madamozels and cognac, I might have gone too, I thought; but then I remembered my serious ideas, and I went on wrapping my leggins.

Corporal Pete Widdy roused up and groaned a hoarse "When do we eat?"

"Toot sweet, me," sighed Gabe. "Um—huh—fooeey! Wot a life! I feel dead from the navel both ways."

"Same here," yawned Pete. "Me for chow and about a gallon of caffay. Caffay royal tray bon pour ma."

"Make 'er snappy," I said. "Don't you know we're in Paris?"

The old life was coming up in me now and I felt quite a stir inside as I thought that I actually was in the famous Frog city of Paris and could stay here till midnight. Lieutenant Hogan, the convoy commander, had left us free until that time to take part in what he called "The Battle of Paris."

In ten minutes we were washed and shaved, and then we went to look for chow. We argued for a while as to where we should go to get the finest Frog breakfast in Paris; but when the smiling Y. M. C. A. clerk told us there wasn't any such thing as a real breakfast in Paris, except here at the Y. M. C. A. Hotel, where we could have American ham and eggs and hot cakes, the three of us about fell all over ourselves making a break for the dining-room.

It was a swell Frog one and the waiters were so soft and polite that butter wouldn't have melted in their mouths; but, for all that, they finally brung us out an honest old home breakfast. There were half a dozen hot

cakes for each of us, besides a regular order of ham and eggs; and if I hadn't been so half-starved it would have given me a sentimental turn about home; for there was the sunny yolks of the eggs and the bubbly white shining up from between two smoking slices of red-brown ham on a blue-bordered plate, and the hot cakes smoking on another one, and coffee steaming from blue-banded cups; the dishes were about like Ma's; but before I could get sentimental, I smelled the smoke and the steam, and the sunny shine of the fried eggs seemed to just dazzle me, and I could only dribble at the mouth as Pete Widdy said in his hoarse voice, "Oh, boy, here's where we sure enough eat!"

And didn't we, though! The smells of the ham and eggs and coffee made me simply ravening, and as I chewed and swallowed big mouthfuls of the wonderful home grub down, I simply kept my eyes shut most of the time and went into a kind of blissful daze. I forgot everything and never had any real thoughts at all, but just let myself soak in the comfortable warm feelings that drifted through me, from my head to my toes.

But by the time I was started on a second half-dozen of hot cakes, I begun to feel a little bit stuffed, and my mind went to having serious ideas again. At first they were warm, sentimental ones about my dear old Ma at home, and what fine breakfasts she had cooked for me ever since I could remember, and what fine ones she would cook when I was back home again. I could actually feel my eyes was wet as I got down to the fifth one of the second half-dozen hot cakes and could see the sirup in threads and blots on the blue band of the plate, just as it had used to be at home. And if I hadn't had half of my second cup of coffee left and hadn't taken my time

about drinking it down, I might have bawled right there before everybody. Not because I was sad or homesick; but it had come to me so strong that I would certainly see my dear old folks again now; for I had fought in an airplane fight and didn't have a presentiment of coming to an early end any more; and it actually seemed like all I'd have to do would be to soldier right, take a serious holt on myself again, and get some religion back; and probably the war would be over in a month or two; and here I was in Paris, with the sunlight so bright out there on the big boulevard; and I felt so stuffed and comfortable and good, so altogether fine, that I was actually sentimental.

Well, it was surprising, but Gabe Smith was the same way. We started talking as we smoked cigarettes, and Gabe went to telling about his home folks and a girl he used to know back in Oskaloosa, Iowa; and he swore at himself as a fool for ever leaving the old butcher shop and going to Chi, to work as a meat-cutter for Armour.

"I figger, though, I'll go back to old Oskaloosa and settle down when it's fini la gear," sighed Gabe. "I've learnt to appreciate a home."

"Me, too," sighed Pete Widdy. "When it's fini la gear, me for the old asphalt team again, and the li'l flat on Madison. And if I ever crab at the old lady and the kid like I used to, I hope I croak!"

Pete's talk of home life made me more sentimental than ever; and I hauled out Lola Bandon's snapshots, which I always carried with me; and I told the corporals, winking and blushing as I did, that probably I'd settle in a Kansas City flat myself as soon as I got back to the States.

"Hell, I don't blame you, Matt," sighed Gabe, as he looked at the snapshots. "Damn, don't lookin' at the pitcher of a Jane like her make you sick of Frog women?"

"I'll say," said Pete. "Me for my old lady."

After while we got tired of sentimentering that way over the breakfast dishes, so we rose up and started out to see the town. In the lobby a secretary stopped us and asked if we wanted to go through a king's palace out at Versailles that afternoon. He said we could go in a party, and it would only cost us our fare, as a Y. M. C. A. lecturer would guide the party through, point out the features of the palace, and not charge for it. The three of us stared at one another, and I know that I for one was thinking, "Should I spend the day and evening ripping around with the madamozels, or should I try to educate myself and learn something about the history and prominent buildings which I can tell Ma when I am home again?" And then I remembered how I'd promised myself I'd try to get some of my religion back. Well, I decided, if I was going to turn over a new leaf, now was the time to begin. So I said I'd take the trip. And then the other two corporals agreed, too.

"We ought to learn something while we have the chance," I said, when we were out on the boulevard.

"Sure," said Pete. "A trip through a king's palace'll be something I can describe to my kids long as I live."

"Yeah," agreed Gabe. "To hell with this Battle of Paris they tell about. Let's lay off the rough stuff. Learn something, that's us. Then I can look Madam Sophie in the eye when we get back to Houel."

The humor I was in I didn't want to think of the madams in Houel. I was thankful and glad that I had

let Sergeant Funke go ahead and make a fool of himself about Madam Odile. The humor I was in now I just wanted to be like my old sentimental Kansas self.

We walked along in the direction the secretary had told us to take for the biggest boulevard of Paris. We didn't have much to say, but just looked at the buildings, the markets, the people in the sunny streets, the cafés, the funny signs, the street cars, which had madamozels running them, the crazy, dinky taxicabs, and so on. Just once in a while Pete or Gabe would see something they could compare to something like it in "old Chi," and they would both agree that Chicago had the best. So there wasn't much talk.

The big boulevard was named after the Italians, and it was a beautiful, wide one, for a fact. And when they saw the amazingly broad sidewalks, with awnings out over them and tables and chairs under the awnings, the wide clean pavement, the shade trees along, the gray, handsome, comfortable-looking buildings which were never tall, gangling, and overgrown like the big city buildings of Chicago and New York, the Frog people all smiling cheerfully as they sauntered by, the pavement so sunny and the shade trees so cool-looking, and birds twittering for all they were worth in the green leaves—when we got among all this, Pete and Gabe shut up about "old Chi" and we all set down to have some real beer and feast our eyes. We just set and drank and feasted our eyes, never saying a word until we saw a big team of gray Percherons come stomping by, hitched to a regular American truck.

"Oh, Jeezus!" Pete Widdy nearly cried into his beer. "I could swear I was seein' one of Armour's fine teams!"

And Gabe had to grab him by the shoulder, for he

acted like he was going to run out into the middle of the Italians' boulevard and paw over the Percherons like they was relations.

It was the most restful and peaceful morning imaginable that we had, sauntering up and down the boulevard like the Paris people did, meeting other soldiers and the Marine m. p.'s, but not paying them any mind, looking over the statues in the squares and wondering what they were about, joshing harmlessly with the café madamozels where we would stop to have some beer.

At noon we had another fine meal at the Y. M. C. A. Hotel. Fried chicken, mashed potatoes, string beans, and—a genuine juicy, sugary, cinnamony green-apple pie, with a crust so flaky and light you'd never know you had it in your mouth if it wasn't for the extra flavor. The beer and some of the café madamozels had weakened us a little in our sentimental humor; but that green-apple pie, on top of the fried chicken and string beans, made it bloom very brightly again.

At one o'clock we started on the trip to Versailles, or "Versigh," as the secretary who guided us called the town where the palace was. About sixteen soldiers, besides us three corporals, were making the trip. They were mostly the serious-looking kind, like the ones of old Company F who had been busted from corporals by Johnny Hard. None of the other 187th men were along, so the three of us stuck close together.

First we marched to a big square where the opera house was, then we took the Metro subway to a place where we could get the Versailles electric. Then it was a twenty-minute ride or so to the palace town.

While we were hiking up the streets to the palace, the secretary, a handsome old man and a mighty good

talker, who wasn't at all like some of the bossy young snots who gave the Y. M. C. A. a bad name, lectured us about the town; and before we had even come to the king's palace, I was glad to be on the trip, for I was already getting a good education out of it, learning so much about French history that I knew it nearly as well as American.

It appeared that back in the old days of France there was a king named Louis Fourteen who was really a good deal of a man and got to cutting quite a figure, but who was flattered so much and was so naturally swell-headed that finally the Frog country was just about too small to hold him. Anyway, he would blow money right and left, not only for wars, as kings was really supposed to do in those days before anybody thought of sweeping autocracy from God's fair earth, but for any crazy humor that took him. If he would see a woman who roused his curiosity a little, Louis Fourteen never let the fact that he was a married man stand in the way at all; he would take up with the woman and actually spend more money on her and give her more presents than he would his lawful wedded wife. What made it so bad was that the Frog people were putting up all the money they could possibly spare, with the idea that Louis Fourteen would use it to go to war and make the world safe for his monarchy, as that was considered the right idea in his time.

But Louis Fourteen went to spending more and more on the women he would take up with; and finally he got one who could twist him around her little finger; and then it was "Louis this" and "Louis that" till she just about run him ragged, riding him to death like an overbearing sergeant would a corporal or a private in our army.

At last she wasn't even satisfied to live a high and

mighty life in Paris, so she told Louis Fourteen he would have to build her a quiet place out in the country, where she could go and rest when her nerves got on edge from Paris life, and that was all there was to it.

So Louis Fourteen went to building her a chatoe at Versailles, but it was really a palace.

It was a swampy country then and full of malarly, so the first thing that was done was to fill in the swamps; and before the swamps had been filled in and the palace put up and the gardens planted, around twenty thousand men had died of malarly and typhoid!

And not a soul kicked about all this sickness and dying from carrying out the fool notion of a woman who wasn't even the king's lawful wife, and who might not live in the palace a day before she would be sick and tired of it! For Louis Fourteen was the king, and all the Frog people knuckled down to him just like they did to the pope.

Well, Louis Fourteen didn't get only the main part of the palace built, after all, before he died. Still, it was big enough, as you can imagine when you know that even the *barn* was of a size to hold six thousand horses! It was a long, low, stone building, but it covered enough ground to look like a palace itself.

The secretary lectured on about the king and how he come to build the palace, until we were inside the mighty gates. Then he lifted his hand like a minister and said in a solemn voice, "Behold! the work of Louis Fourteen the Magnificent!"

And that palace was something to stare at, sure enough. Not on account of its size, exactly, but that it just made you feel feeble and small yourself, especially when the secretary went on lecturing and telling about the Swiss

Guards, who were all six feet and over and wore grand red uniforms and used to hold wonderful drills in this great yard, while Louis Fourteen and his woman looked on proudly from "yon balcony above."

We marched on over the brick pavement towards the grand palace, and I felt myself trying to walk light, so that my hobnails wouldn't rattle too loud.

The secretary kept going on his lecture, and I listened for all I was worth.

Louis Fourteen had a son who was king after him, a grandson who got the job next, and so on down the line. None of them was up to his mark, except for assessing taxes and taking up with any woman who struck their eye. And finally the people was so bowed down and oppressed and it become such a scandal all over the country about the last of the Louis kings neglecting his lawful wedded wife and living openly with another woman and spending the people's money on her, that leaders were inspired; and the people were stirred up till they rose in their wrath for the purpose of wiping autocracy from the face of the earth and making the world safe for common folks, just as we were doing now.

Well, they didn't do it, for they were Frogs, and all ignorant, of course. They never knowed when enough was enough; and so they didn't stop their revolting and go into politics when they ought to; but they just kept on jailing and killing kings, dukes, counts, and so on whenever one showed himself.

Then Napoleon Bonaparte, who I'd heard of before, got a handholt on the people; but he wasn't a politician, so all the old troubles begun again; for he went to making wars, taking all the people's money, and living with any woman he felt like, just as the Louis kings had.

But ever since he was whipped at Waterloo, the politicians had been running France most of the time, and politics had made it one of the safest countries for democracy in the world. So the Versailles palace was just an empty show place now; for the politicians would never dare to take women there for wild times, like the old-time kings did.

I got the strangest feeling as I tramped up the marble stairs to the second floor, my hobnails and the others' making such a clatter it would certainly have stirred up the Louis kings' ghosts if there was any. And when we rambled on through the great rooms, gaping around at the beautiful paintings on the walls and ceilings, and when the secretary described how Louis Fourteen and his courtiers used to dress and parade in their high society affairs, it somehow made me feel like I used to when I would go to the Clevisburg graveyard and look at the tombstones of the Kansas pioneers. For all of the fact that there was twenty of us soldiers, it didn't seem like the palace was alive at all, and I thought I would rather stand out in the big sunny yard and listen to the Y. M. C. A. secretary tell about the scandals in the old kings' families.

Even in a tremendous long room that had looking-glasses all along one wall and, down all of the other wall, windows opening over a great park, I felt the same way. There was nobody in the paths of the park and there was no water running in the fountains. I stared up at the pictures in the ceiling and tried to listen to the secretary's descriptions, but I had lost heart for them. The inside of the palace certainly was as wonderful and historical as the outside, but it depressed me, somehow.

When we got around to the Louis kings' bedroom, the

most I could think of was to wonder if all the kings had died there; and the others looked at the grand high bed, with its fancy spreads and curtains in about the same mournful way; but we all brightened up when the secretary pointed to a door at one side and said that was where Louis Fourteen used to see all the women who called on him; "and one might be a virgin when she went in there with the grand monarch, but one certainly never was a virgin when she came out!"

He went to talking then about the curtains over the huge bed; but I kept looking at the door until it absolutely fascinated me; and I tiptoed to it and laid my hand on the knob, thinking I would just sneak a look and see what the place was like where Louis Fourteen had got the best of so many women. But I had no more than touched the knob when I heard a yell: "Dayfundoo! Dayfundoo!"

And an old Frog in a black uniform came swooping down on me, with both his hands raised like he was going to choke me, so I could only cuss to myself and back away.

Well, I had absolutely lost all taste for the palace, and it seemed like I had learned nearly everything worth knowing about French history, so I proposed to Pete and Gabe that we beat it back to Paris and see some of the prominent buildings.

They agreed heartily, for they had been affected just like I was. We got back to Paris about four o'clock, and we were so kind of dismal that we went to drinking beer on the Italians' boulevard to cheer up. By the time we was cheerful enough to enjoy looking at the prominent buildings, it was six o'clock.

Of course our appetites were roused again by this time,

but we didn't feel like having a Y. M. C. A. meal just now, so we went to a Frog restaurant and ordered a dozen-and-a-half egg omelet with champagne water. It made us absolutely hilarious before we knowed it; and we forgot all about the dismal, depressed feelings we'd had out to the palace and we went to more than laughing and carrying on about Louis Fourteen, wondering what we'd have done in his place, and thinking up so many good cracks and jokes about it that I nearly died laughing.

But I couldn't get entirely shed of my serious humor and my determination to turn over a new leaf that quick, so before long I reminded Pete and Gabe that we hadn't seen the prominent buildings yet. They sobered down at that and we started out looking for the prominent buildings. We were hazy about the location of any, so we asked a gendarm. He looked us over with a frown, trying to understand what we meant; we made a lot of motions and talked some more Frog, all three of us at once; and finally the gendarm grinned, said, "Ah, oui, comprond," and put us in a taxi. He gave the taxi-driver an order, and we started out to see the prominent buildings in grand style.

Well, the taxi-driver hauled us about a mile, and then unloaded us in front of a building that had a big 27 over the door. The building didn't appear prominent at all, but the driver motioned like we should go inside; then he asked for our fare, and when Gabe gave him a ten-franc note, he jumped into his cab and beat it without offering a sounteem of change.

We cursed after him for a spell, then we decided to investigate the prominent building. And we had no more than stepped into the hall than we saw what it was. Over in a big room there was a mob of madamozels, and not

one of them had hardly enough on to flag a hand-car, and they were dancing around with a bunch of American and allied soldiers, to the music of a machine piano.

"Looky here," I said, trying to keep true to the promise I'd made myself, "we wasn't lookin' for this kind of place. We hadn't ought to go in, had we?"

"Well, it certainly ain't no prominent building," said Pete, with his eyes bugging at a little blonde. "I guess we hadn't."

"Aw, thunder," said Gabe, "what's the use? We might as well give up. Hell, we went out to educate ourselves this afternoon, and all we done was to listen to the stories about what good times the old Frog kings used to have with women. And I'm goin' to admit free and frank I been envyin' my head off at 'em ever since. And I guess I'll stick here for a while."

I honestly tried to argue with Gabe, but I couldn't really put up much of an argument. If the Y. M. C. A. secretary had only stood up and exhorted about the sins of the Louis kings and painted some pictures of them burning in hell-fire eternal for their sins, why, I'd very likely have got the strength to have kept my promise. But he would only tell about the women they had got the best of, and then he would wave his hand and shout something about Louis Fourteen the Magnificent. And I had actually myself come to envy the Louis kings considerably. The educational part of the trip had been fine, but it certainly hadn't helped me any morally. I just couldn't muster up the strength to answer Gabe Smith when he asked me what right we had to think we was any better than Louis Fourteen the Magnificent.

"As for me, I don't claim to be any better," said

Gabe, "and I guess I'll fight for a while in the Battle of Paris."

He had no more than said it when three madamozels came dancing up; and they had grabbed us, hauled us to a table, and started us to drinking wine with them before I could think of a word to say. When I did think to tell them that we had to go pretty quick and see some of the prominent buildings, they only ha-ha'd like it was a wonderful joke and made us get up and dance. After the dance Gabe and Pete were determined to stay, so I had to stay too and look out for them. So I cut loose and went to buying wine, and dancing, pawing and singing around like everybody else, trying to have a little fun on my own account, while I looked out for Gabe and Pete.

By and by I began to get hazy about what was going on, as eating so much that day seemed to have brought on a bilious spell. Anyhow, I was sick at the stomach when I woke up the next morning, in Tours. And I was still headachy when we got back to Houel. I was disgusted with Gabe and Pete because they had used the scandals of Louis Fourteen as an excuse to perform themselves, and I was discontented with myself when I thought of how I'd stopped turning over a new leaf and stayed to look out for them. I couldn't figure out why it was, but my best intentions seemed bound to always turn out wrong.

XII

LOVE AFFAIRS



EAD 'er through here," ordered First Sergeant Novak. "I want to hear what's happened to Beedy."

The company clerk was out, and the first sergeant himself had looked in the box to see if any mail had come for me while I was gone. He saw who it was from and said that, then he leaned back against his desk and stared at me while I was opening the letter, turning a pencil over and over in his hand and jamming it against his blouse to shove it through his fingers. But I got so buried in the letter I forgot him until I had read it through. And no wonder. This was it, written in a shaky hand:

Dear Matt:

How are you making it and where are you keeping yourself. I expect you are somewhere on the line now, but I hope this letter finds you still alive and full of hell.

Well, old kid, I can hear you saying cut out the bull and let a guy know what it's all about. So, to make it short and snappy, here I am, in the Brennes hospital with my right hiker missing, and wherever it's at I guess there ain't much left of it. Boy, when you tangle up with one of them Austrian 88's you sure are lucky if there's enough of you left to even eat, let alone write a letter. I was dug in when Fritz started heaving the 88's over the platter, and boy, it was his day, for they was nearly all strikes. But my leg got hit by a fast one, and I took my base. Base hospital, see. Ha. Ha.

I got some pieces of shrapnel in various parts, too, but they don't amount to nothing. Old Shempk was next to me when I was hit and he was there on the first aid or I expect all my troubles would have been over. But I guess I won't kick off and it's me for the States and old Chi, and I'd feel O. K. except for being so nervous.

Well, old kid, I'd like to tell you about everything but writing kind of tires me and I don't know what the censor would stand for. But maybe he won't cut out this about Gregorio. The Portygee, you know. He went into an old shell-hole and used a stick because he didn't have any paper, savvy voo, and the stick had mustard gas on it. The poor sucker was in misery and couldn't walk, but he said, Jeez, me, I get a wound stripe anyway, but I don't tell peoples where is my wound. Ha. Ha.

Well, old kid, I guess it's me for Chi, and, I don't know why, but I feel more of an optimist than I used to, and I think maybe I can make up with that girl I told you about, not that I would think of marrying her and me in this shape, but somehow I just want to see her more than I do my own folks. Well, I'm tired and can't think good. If you ain't gone up yet, tell all the old company hello. I'll always wish we could have gone up together, old kid. If you ain't gone up how are you and Odile and tell the old gal I still love her. So long.

Your old bunkie,

PVT. JOSEPH BEEDY,
Base Hospital, Brennes, France.

By the time I reached the end of the letter I was feeling as sick as I'd been that morning at Tours and the shaky lines of the letter were dancing every which way in front of me. Then I heard the first sergeant's growl. It sounded far away.

"Come on with 'er. What's the news?"

"Pore old Joe," I said weakly. "He's in the Brennes Hospital with his leg shot off."

"Jeezus! Old Beedy! Damn, she's a war all right! Anything about the rest of 'em?"

"No—only the Portygee, Gregorio. But here, sergeant, read the letter. I can't hardly tell about it."

He went to reading the letter and I was beginning to think the miserable thoughts that were to torment me so much in the days and nights to come, and to about spoil all the fine feelings I'd got out of being such a good corporal with the Montana troops and coming through the airplane fight so well and which were to make it so hard for me to go on turning over a new leaf—those first miserable thoughts had just begun to throb in my aching head, when Johnny Hard came in with the company clerk. He was wearing a sour expression like I'd never seen on his face before.

"What the hell's all this ball-up in the replacements' service records, sergeant?" he snapped crankily as soon as he stepped in. "I've been fightin' paper at regimental, battalion, and supply headquarters all day. Want to get to the field tomorrow. Now this comes up. What——" Then he saw me. "Hello, corporal. How's the front? Looks like it made you sick."

"Sir," I said, "I just got a letter from Joe Beedy. He's lost his leg."

"One come over with his name on it, hey? How's he makin' it?"

The first sergeant handed Johnny Hard the letter. He read it through in a minute.

"Selah gear," he said. "Too damn bad. Beedy was a soldier."

Then he and the first sergeant and the company clerk

went to pawing over a stack of service records. I stood there and heaved a big sigh every little bit, and I just ached and ached to talk to somebody about Joe. But there was just the three stooped backs to talk at, and Johnny Hard was swearing like fury at "the infernal war babies, the he-fluesy ninety-day wonders, such rotten officers they would even jim up service records," and I couldn't say a word.

But I felt like they would talk to me some more about Joe, and I stood there and read the letter through again. But Johnny Hard paid me no mind when he straightened up; he gave an order or two about the service records, then he swung about and started to tramp out. He hesitated when he passed in front of the window that opened on the Tadousac yard. He stopped, and he gazed until the sour expression on his face began to turn into a smile; then he suddenly set his jaw and tramped out.

"I believe Johnny Hard's fallin' at last," grinned the company clerk.

"Shut up and get after your records. What the hell do you care?" asked the first sergeant, with his toughest look.

Neither one of them paid any more attention to me, so I sighed heavily again and went on out into the street. As I did, I glanced through the fancy bars of the Tadousac gate and I saw Junie out by the well. She was standing like a girl in a picture, sort of playing with a bunch of green grapes that hung even with her waist from a big climbing vine. Her head was bent and the sunlight was dazzling in her yellow curls and on the bare white nape of her neck. She certainly looked dreamy and sweet as she fooled with the bunch of grapes, and for a minute I forgot my troubles in gazing at her. At

last she shook her head, seemed to make a mournful sigh, slowly turned, with one of her soft, drowsy motions and smiled at the orderly-room window. Then she frowned, and when she saw me, she wrinkled her nose, shook her curls, and danced away to the kitchen door.

I turned away to go to my billet, and as I walked slowly on, I tried to figure for a minute on why it was Junie had got so peeved just because I was looking at her; but it was only for a minute; for I had too many miserable thoughts about poor old Joe to bother over Junie Ta-dousac.

At the kitchen and supply room Gabe Smith and Pete Widdy had the cooks and mechanics gathered around them in the shade. They appeared to be passing out a great story about our trip to the front and the Battle of Paris.

"Here's the old Kansas Cyclone!" Pete yelled, as I came towards them. "You ought to heard him cuss out Fritz in the airplane raid! And was he stewed in Number 27 last night—moan doo, look at him, cockeyed yet!"

"Cockeyed, nothin'," I said. "No wonder I look that way. I got a letter from Joe Beedy; and he's down in Brennes with his leg shot off!"

That sobered them up right enough, and they all went to talking at once: "For Chri' sake! Old Joe!" "Why, he couldn't a been on the line more'n three weeks! That quick!" "Man, that makes you think serious about the old war, I'll say." "I hope to spit! Why, I can still see old Joe, healthy and altogether as anybody, and hear his tenor in the harmony—I simply can't believe he's all shot up." "Hell, I can; and you could, too, if you was to see a depot platform full of 'em, bloody bandages and sick faces—Jeezus!" "How's the others?" "Yeah, what's

Joe say about old Shempk?" "And that big Ardell kid—one fine guy, I'll tell the world—does Joe say how he was?" "And Dan Logan?" "How 'bout Mike Neff and Harp Donahey?" "And Bill Schwartz, old Schwartzy?" ". . . that comical Greek, Gus Kastopolous?"

"Here, sergeant," I said to Mess Sergeant Hoeffer, who had joined the bunch. "Read it out."

He did, and everybody sympathized with poor old Joe at first; but it was only a few minutes till they were talking excitedly about the front; wondering what outfit Joe'd been in and how many of the other Company F men had been gassed, wounded, and killed. Every man had some particular friend he was anxious about, and at last Doc Makin was the only one who was talking to me about Joe. I went into the kitchen with him and we talked very sadly for quite a bit, and I felt considerably comforted. But soon the cooks were rushing it to get the evening mess ready, and I had to leave.

I tramped over by myself and clumb up to my billet, still thinking of what Doc Makin had said last: "I guess nobody was ever loyaler than Joe. He certainly was strong for you after you cleaned that mob of engineers."

That was the truth, there wasn't any doubt about it, I thought, as I laid back on my blankets, clasped my hands under my head, and gazed up at the old rafters and tiles of the roof. There wasn't another soul in the billet, and my thoughts went to running on. Yes, sir, Joe Beedy had made himself my bunkie, and with him there was no fooling about it. Whatever he had was mine. Whatever he could do for me he did. If we had gone up together, he would have stuck to me through hell and high water. And he had certainly believed that when the war was over, and if we both come out of it alive, we'd be closer

friends than ever. It was wonderful, that's what it was; wonderful to think about, when I remembered how it had seemed like I could never keep a good friend back home excepting the Collins boys; and they were so ornery and almost vicious that Ma had felt disgraced whenever I run with them. But here was old Joe Beedy writing me the closest, friendliest kind of a letter, not asking a particle of sympathy or help, still just being my old bunkie. And what had I ever done for him? What had I ever done?

And here it was a coming, just as I'd been afraid of ever since I read the letter. I couldn't keep it back now. What had I ever done for him? Well, he'd know, as soon as he got back to the States. He'd know, right enough, when he went to Chicago and met up with Sade Nixon again and told her about his army friend, his good old bunkie of Company F—and then I could see Sade Nixon's gray eyes begin to snap and a red flush come over her face as she listened to Joe tell what a hero and what a fine guy his old bunkie, Parve Mattock, was, and I could hear her voice get hysterical like it had that night back of the Swamp Creek dance hall, as she broke in and told him——

For she certainly would tell old Joe; yes, sir, she certainly would; and then what? Lord only knowed what he might do, cripple though he was! I remembered how he had looked that night of the Battle of Cognac Hill, when his eyes turned to fiery slits and he bit the piece out of the glass just before he throwed himself at Black Jean.

Joe had said he would get that bird, if it was his own brother.

I could feel it in my bones that he would, and I just about shuddered all over as I laid there and thought

miserably about it. I remembered the words of a great exhorting revivalist: "Be sure your sin will find you out!"

I could feel how true it was now. For here was mine finding me out at last, and it would surely make a mortal enemy of the only real friend I'd ever known. I groaned out loud. I couldn't help it, I was so desperate to think of all that might happen. And I was moved to think of something I might do to stop the trouble that was looming. If I could get an idea to write to Joe that would make him decide again to never go around Sade Nixon, never see her any more—but right now I couldn't figure out a one.

"Be sure your sin will find you out!"

As I laid there and heard it again, I begun to fear and tremble that the Old Nick would show his wicked fiery face and say over his claim on my immortal soul. But he never come. There was never a sign of him in the gloomy light of the billet, never a flash of his red form in the shadowy corners or the dark of the high roof. And all of a sudden I thought that he would never come. My religion was gone. The Old Nick had me foul. I was bound to him for good, and he wouldn't bother with me any more. I had simply been a fool to get so exalted over serious ideas when I was mired so deep in sin.

But still I felt miserable and tormented about Joe Beedy and Sade Nixon. Somehow my conscience seemed to be strong as ever, even if my religion was gone. Well, what was I going to do to satisfy my conscience? I figured and figured, and finally it came to me with a jolt that maybe I wouldn't have to go back to Clevisburg! There was Lola Bandon in Kansas City; I could go to her when I was out of the army; and why couldn't I marry her and not go back to Clevisburg? But there was Ma—

my conscience would never let me keep away from my dear old lady—and, oh, blame it, anyway, I wasn't being loyal to poor old Joe, who had always been so loyal to me, and there he was in the hospital, with his leg shot off—I'd simply *have* to buckle down and think of something that would keep him from going back to Sade Nixon and write it to him, and then everything—but what if he went ahead and wrote to her and saw her again anyway—still, there was Lola Bandon—but my good old folks—Elsie Snodgrass, too—oh, what a muss, what a blamed infernal muss!

Well, I become so miserable and low in my mind that I was about to bawl; and then I got mad, and instead of bawling I begun to cuss to myself; and I called the war, the draft, the army, and the Frog country every name I could bring to mind. And then I went to cussing myself to think I could have stayed safe and sound in old Clevisburg as well as not, and never have come to all this grief, if I had only used my head and got exempted. But here I was, in the worst muss imaginable. My religion gone, my soul lost, but my conscience still alive and tormenting me to death with miserable thoughts of what might happen when I was out of the army. I almost wished I could be busted from a corporal and sent to the front and shot to pieces, so that my troubles and worries would be over. I could almost wish that now, since my fear of the Old Nick was gone and it seemed like I was damned for good and no matter how long I lived it couldn't be helped any. I just laid there and cussed to myself and thought recklessly that I wouldn't care even if I was sent to the front in a prisoner battalion. I felt as reckless and wild as I ever had in all my born days; and if I was busted from a corporal, sent to the front, and come

to an early end, dying like a dog, well what of it? My troubles would be over, anyway.

Hoomb. Hoomb. Hoomb. Hoomb.

A company was marching at attention down the street. I got up and went to the door. Company E swung by. Behind it Company F made a column left, then a squads right and halted in a company front out in the big yard. I was so amazed to see a heavy-set officer with a captain's bars on his fat shoulders ordering Sergeant Shevlin to dismiss the company that I lost track of my miserable thoughts. The captain was one of the replacement officers the majors had been instructing at the same time when us non-coms were training the Montana soldiers. But instead of being sent to the front, it appeared like this captain had taken Johnny Hard's place as commander of Company F.

"Hello, sergeant," I said, as Shevlin came up the ladder. "What's the——"

"Hello," he said shortly. "There's your squad, the six to the right of your blankets. Get their names and fall 'em in with you at retreat."

I swallowed a couple of times and never said anything, but went to taking the names of my new squad as the replacement soldiers strung up the ladder and crowded around their blankets, for their soap, towels, and shaving-outfits. All of my new men had foreign names, so it took me quite a bit to get them spelled out and written down. By then Sergeant Shevlin was drying his face. He motioned to me to set down by him on his bunk, away from the other soldiers. He had a cold, suspicious look, and when he spoke, it was in his hard, commanding voice.

"Looky here, corporal, it's damn funny how every-

thing's turned. Johnny Hard soldiers his head off, he's in Jake with Major Kessler, but he don't get a shot at the front, and not only that, but the colonel slips in this replacement officer, Captain Traub, as company commander. Dill is detached for special service at regimental headquarters. Johnny Hard is S. O. L. with his mitts full of paper-work again. That's what's happened. 'S damn funny. Now what do you know about it? By God, you give 'er to me straight!"

"Why, not a thing!" I said, absolutely dumfounded. "Why, sergeant, how could I?"

I could only just gape at him, his gray eyes looked so steely and cold.

"How could you? Hell, you know. The colonel's got an earful of that battle from somewhere. From Dill, of course. And where would Dill get it? Say!"

"I swear, honest to God, I never told him a word, sergeant," I said, feeling a terrible panic as I realized what his suspicions were, and feeling like I could bawl, too, on account of there not being a single thing to them. But I could look the sergeant in the eye because I knowed I was absolutely innocent, and I swore again that, honest to God, I'd never said anything. And finally I convinced Sergeant Shevlin.

"Well, I believe you're shootin' straight," he said in his old friendly way, and I just about fell off the bunk I was so glad to hear him. "But, Jeezus, it's funny. Dill must have had something stronger'n just the Frog gossip back of him to have got the colonel to slam the lieutenant so hard. 'S damn funny. Well, selah gear pa bon. Forget this and watch your step. Got a cigarette? How was the front?"

LOVE AFFAIRS

I went to telling him about it and then poor old Joe, and I showed the sergeant read it over very solemnly, puffing out his blowing up cigarette smoke from the mouth as he did. He whistled when he sighed: "Well, for Chri' sake." Then he sigh and said again, "Well for Chri' sake. Bon. Old Beedy. He was a good kid. Seems like good ones get it. It's just bums like us comes out. funny. There's Johnny Hard and Pickle Dill——" Sergeant Shevlin stopped his sighing talk as the bugle notes of first call sounded down in the street. He reached for his blouse and sidearms. "All out for retreat!" he yelled.

I folded up the letter and went to get my own equipment. No matter how everything was, we had to go on soldiering.

The new replacements were Chicago men, and mostly foreigners. But they were very much at home with non-coms like Sumovski and Karsak, and we had plenty of them in Company F. It seemed a lot like the old company as we fell in and I heard the soldiers laughing and joshing about Clark, State, Dearborn, the Loop, Jackson Park, the West Side, and the other streets and places back in Chicago. But I couldn't enjoy it, for my head was aching like it would split, and I was torn up in my mind and depressed all over. I never had a thrill out of the band music and the Colors; all I was thinking of was to get a cup of coffee and then roll into my blankets and have a good night's rest so that I would be feeling like myself again. And I was one of the first to rush away when we were dismissed.

"Corporal Mattock." A low voice stopped me.

Lieutenant Dill.

my quarters after mess. Don't let anyone

brushed mine as he turned away in a hurry. I didn't have time to say, "Yes, sir." And I hurried through the mob of soldiers. I hoped Sergeant Dill wouldn't see Lieutenant Dill speak to me, for it would have made him suspicious over nothing again. He didn't, for he spoke in the same old friendly way when we got our mess tools and put away our equipment in the billet.

A cup of coffee and a few swallows of tomatoes was all the chow I could force down at mess. I put my tools away then and went for a walk by myself. I walked around by the square, over by regimental headquarters, back around by the Romish church, then slantways up a street, and at the second block I turned sharply to my left and up the street that led from this direction to the Company F orderly room. Up there a ways was a little gate in a stone wall, a small yard, and the billet of Lieutenant Dill.

My feet dragged up the street like I was following a plow. Over and over I'd been saying to myself on the walk, "I ain't goin' to tell a single thing. Everything is simply spoiled now, anyway. I'll just turn all holts loose and not tell him a blamed thing, not a blamed thing. Let him bust me from a corporal and send me to the front. Everything is spoiled, I'm absolutely lost, and I might as well let all holts go, come to an early end, and have it over with. I won't tell him a blamed thing, not a blamed thing." Faster than ever I was saying it over to myself now. But I dragged my feet on up the street.

And I gazed up and down when I come to the little gate. And finally I slipped inside.

Lieutenant Dill looked more superior and important than I had ever seen him. He was leaning back in his chair and pecking his knuckles on the table while he stared up frowning. His chin was down so that there was a red roll of fat above his collar. His jaw was set so that his lips were tight together and the drooping corners of his mouth were drawn down like hooks, and his green-gray eyes snapped from a squinting frown. He was going to try to bully me into telling it, I knowed. Well, that was all the good it would do him. I'd show him how much I cared for my corporal's stripes.

"Corporal!" He barked that out, and then he stuck his right hand into the breast of his blouse before he went on. "Corporal Mattock! It was I who insisted on your promotion. You know the reason?"

"Yes, sir," I said, feeling my face begin to burn.

"Corporal! There is a cancerous evil working havoc in the morale of the allied armies. Corporal! It is in ours!"

I couldn't help but begin to wonder, as the little lieutenant spread the fingers of his left hand flat on the table, frowned hard at them, and shoved his other hand further into his blouse. What in thunder did this have to do with——

"Bolshevism!" barked Lieutenant Dill, glaring at me again. "The red menace!"

My hard feelings was dying down and I could only swallow and stare as I tried to remember some of the things I had seen in the Paris American papers about what was called "the Russian debackle" and wonder again what in thunder Johnny Hard had to do with that.

"Corporal! Stand at ease." And now Lieutenant Dill rose up and made me a regular speech, still keeping his right hand in his blouse. "The propaganda of the Reds is a greater menace to us than the Boche army. Like the germs of a plague, it spreads its evil invisibly. And like a plague it must be fought with invisible weapons," the little lieutenant orated. "The Intelligence Service has a new function which makes it the most important arm of the A. E. F. I am now the intelligence officer of this regiment. I must have a trustworthy assistant in each company. You, corporal, are selected from Company F."

"Yes, sir," I said, still wondering, but beginning to feel mighty good because he hadn't asked me about Johnny Hard.

"Have you an idea of what your duties will be? Well, the first necessity is absolute secrecy. You will be like a Secret Service man. Now do you understand? Once a week you will report secretly to me in my quarters."

"But what will I report about, sir?" I said. "Just about whatever Bolshevism I hear talked for the Russians?"

"Everything that is injurious to the morale of the troops, the espreedy core. Well—whatever crabbing you hear. Understand that. You remember whatever crabbing you hear and report it to me."

"Sir, that would be a lot to remember," I said. "And, besides, sir, the soldiers don't think it's right to run to an officer tellin' things."

"Nonsense. This will be in the line of duty. You will be engaged in intelligence work—secret service. Besides, I shan't require reports on the petty complaints about food, the routine of duty, and the like. What you are to listen for and report are expressions of contempt for the army, its officers, and our government, objections to universal

military training, sympathy for the Bolsheviks or the Boche, hopes for peace, and you will report to me any one of the replacements who reveals himself as a socialist or a pacifist. You know what they are, I hope?"

"Yes, sir, I think I could tell 'em."

"Very good. Now don't think wrongly of this intelligence—this secret service work. It is an honor to be selected for it. I am testifying my faith in your patriotism. Oh, you needn't look doubtful. Listen!"

"Yes, sir."

"In your home state you have had a prohibition law for many years. It could not have succeeded unless law-loving religious people had helped in its enforcement by spying out violators and reporting them to the authorities. You have never thought that was wrong, have you?"

"No, sir," I said honestly, "I was brung up to think that was the right thing to do."

"Well, corporal, suppressing Bolshevism in the army is much more the right thing to do. That's all. You report to me every Wednesday night after mess. And remember that secrecy is the great necessity."

"All right, sir."

"Just a second," said the lieutenant, as I started to salute. "There is one thing more. You are to report violations of the regulations by officers and non-commissioned officers, also. And—eh—any fraternizing between officers and men. This last is *very* important." He stuck out his chin, screwed up his face in its most colicky scowl, and squinted his eyes till they were just two gray-green specks. "Well—that's all. You may go."

When I got out into the street all my resigned and patriotic feelings roused up again at the idea of doing this intelligence work. It really gave me a thrill to think t

I was trusted enough to be a kind of Secret Service man; and the lieutenant had showed me how noble and patriotic the work was. It would be another wonderful thing to tell the Clevisburg folks about when I was home—when I was home—— And now that my army troubles seemed to be all settled again, the torment of my personal ones come back, and all I wanted to do was to roll into my blankets, go to sleep, and forget everything.

I was absolutely worn out and went to sleep right away; but some time in the night I dreamed that I was walking down a big room with Lola Bandon. All of a sudden I saw it was the bedroom of Louis Fourteen; and I went to take Lola to show her the door that opened into the room where all the women called on Louis; and I opened the door, and there was Johnny Hard and Junie Tadousac, dressed in lacy, ruffled clothes like I had seen in the paintings of the courteurs! He bawled for me to get out, and I backed away and turned, only to face Joe Beedy and Sade Nixon, both dressed in the old courteurs' style. Joe had one of their long, slim swords in his hand. He lifted the point and come at me, his eyes like fiery slits—and I woke up with a yell.

"What's the matter wi' yah?" I heard Sergeant Shevlin's good-natured grumble. "Got something on your mind? Pipe down."

XIII

TENNESSEE



MORNING mess
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and they were laughing an
way close by me. The new
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day. This was to be their

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and the Frog people
seemed mighty beau
up in the French t
raging, troops were
and here we were :

I was still a corp
First Sergeant Nov

other. Sergeant Shevlin was still a were all the other non-coms—except ourse. It had just about made that nus of a Dutchman sick when I got count of his losing everything he eal in the last pay-day crap game. from home then and Odile was oe that her conscience went to at fool of a sergeant. I bought r we were the best of friends use for me to turn over a new

siderably about Joe. I had in which I argued with him e by going back to Chicago, s home folks at Kansas City tes. I painted a fine picture down in Kansas City my-only girl I'd ever really could be close friends all how he would certainly he bothered that girl oe hadn't been coming my letter; the answer didn't know his home yway, he would never life, so he might as the Tennesseeans come tter back, telling him ven if she had turned ought to keep him her, if nothing else.

At the time I had thought it was a good argument, but right now I was worrying about it, and I was mighty anxious to get Joe's next letter.

My personal troubles were still quite a bother, but my army ones seemed pretty well settled. I had got along much better than I expected in my intelligence work, having overheard two of the Chicago replacements saying that "Old Woodrow"—meaning our President—"is performin' more like a czar every day and America is a different country," and reporting their Bolshevism secretly to Lieutenant Dill. They had been transferred to a labor battalion, and Lieutenant Dill said to me, "Corporal! I shall not forget this service. It is of more value to your country than the capture of a squad of the enemy!" I hadn't had to report any Bolshevism on the non-coms and officers, as they were all as loyal as I was myself. I was proud of my patriotic intelligence work, and I had got over my fear of being asked to tell anything personal on Johnny Hard.

So about my only army trouble now was the sudden dislike the first sergeant had taken to me. I never knewed why it was, as he never accused me of anything, but I laid it on to the lies which that contemptible Sergeant Funke must have told when I got the best of him. Anyway, he had only snarled a "Hell, no!" when I put in my name for one of the two-weeks' leaves to Aix-les-Bains, and he gave me his tough glare every time he saw me. I had hoped that he and Sergeant Shevlin would go to the officers' training-school and get to be officers, but they had turned the chance down and the supply sergeant and Sergeant Bloedel had gone instead. The two sergeants seemed bound to stick to Johnny Hard, and I saw that

I would have to figure out a way to make the first sergeant see I was his friend. But so far it was tough figuring.

I figured on it for a while now, but it still was tough, so I give it up with a sigh, looked at my wrist watch, and then settled back to listen to the Tennesseans in their talk until it was time to fall in for drill. I couldn't help but enjoy them, they were so much more like my home folks than the Chicago men were, and, besides, Pa's people were a branch of the Tennessee Mattocks, but still I had to admit the Tennesseans were not much for looks, and they were pretty ignorant.

One was saying now: "I don't keer if we *was* two weeks crossin' it, you-all kain't tell me the ocean's bigger'n the hull state of Tenn-o-see! Reason we war so long comin' was the old convoy jest steamed round in circles to fool them 'ere submarines. Three thousand miles acrost? Why, even in the time of the flood it was never such a big pond as that 'ere!"

"Well, I expect you're right," said one of the others of my squad. "I figger myself it don't sound reasonable about such a powerful big stretch of water. But, say, I wonder if we come through England that night we rode up from Brest? Must be roundabout somers."

"I 'low it might be," said one named Bert Daggett. "I've heerd talk of it, but I kain't tell for a fact. Shucks, it makes me wisht I'd a larnt jography when I had a chance one time. Pap had let me go over the mounting to work in a sawmill fer a spell; and over there a missionary got a considerable holt on me, larnin' me a heap of jography and sech; but I couldn't figger how 'twould ever help me any; so when I'd airnt enough to buy me a fiddle and a dog and some store terbaccer, I went back over the

mounting, and pap give me a proper whalin' a-cause I'd 'lowed the preacher to argy against predestination; and it was *sech* a proper whalin' that even the preacher's jography was licked out of me. So I kain't say about England fer a fact."

"Boys, y'all heerd yit the pope is the ruler of this yere French country?" It was Hod Bogan, another of my squad, who asked that. "I jest larnt they air a Romish church in every French town, and no other kind ay-tall. I spoke to that Sergeant Shevlin about it, and he declared to his soul it was a-cause the pope runs the country; and he said when the pope come around we'd have to bow down and kiss his big toe! Well, them as is willin' kin. But as fer me, I was brung up in the Cumberland Presbyterian religion, and I'd die first!"

That got the Tennesseans excited, and they lost all their smiles and went to blasting the Romish church up one side and down the other. I was listening with a lot of natural sympathy until I noticed Corporal Sumovski was staring at them, with a hard scowl on his face. And then I remembered how he was a good friend of the first sergeant and how they both would go to the masses in the Houel Romish church, and I didn't feel so much sympathy with the Tennesseans. It was not good soldiering for them to mock the religion that the first sergeant and so many of the other non-coms of my company believed in. I got up and was going to tell Corporal Sumovski that I'd heard enough of that slander and that I was going to stop it right now, when the bugler spoiled everything by blowing assembly.

Captain Traub, as usual, led Company F to the drill-field this morning. He was a slow-moving, good-natured officer who seldom had much to say to anybody, and so

we didn't dislike him particularly, but he certainly could never make us snap into the drill like we used to under Johnny Hard. And it was nothing like the old days now, even when the lieutenant did take the company out. He had gone to fooling around Junie Tadousac again; then he had suddenly quit her for some reason; and here lately he'd been taking up with Madam Rose some more and had gone to drinking more than he ought. And it wasn't the same in the company as it used to be. None of us went to singing this morning, though the weather was so fine; but all of us non-coms just plodded along in route step and listened to the drawly talk of the Tennesseans.

This Hod Bogan, who had such a powerful prejudice against the Romish church, was number three in the first rank, and so he marched on my right. He was quiet most of the way on the hike, chomping hard on a monster chew of Spearhead, and staring out curiously at the farmhouses, the hayricks, the stubblefields, and the yellowing potato and bean vines. He seemed brighter than the average, but he was a good sample of the average Tennessean for looks.

His long, black hair snarled from under his tin hat, which set up high on a peaked forehead. Small, sly-looking gray eyes. A thin beak of a nose. Lantern jaws and a sallow complexion. A wide mouth, so loose that it seemed to be always in a grin. A small chin that sloped back to a bulging Adam's apple, and which had a streak of tobacco juice on it now. A stringy neck that filled only two-thirds of the blouse collar. A stooped back and a flat chest. Thin arms, so long that six inches of bony wrists showed below the blouse cuffs. Tremendous, hairy hands. The tail of the blouse too short, and flaring out above a baggy britches-seat. Raily legs, and

big feet that were never meant to stand with the heels together, in the position of the soldier, and never would. That was Hod Bogan, a natural-born Tennessean if there ever was one.

They were not so much to look at and they didn't know anything hardly, but still I couldn't help feeling sympathetic and comfortable with these Tennessee boys. Sometimes their talk would remind me of Kansas so much that I would feel homesicker than I had for months. I could imagine the Swamp Creekers being just about like them, if the Swamp Creekers were to turn religious. There wasn't a foreign name among all the Tennesseans, they were every last one of them patriotic, and I knewed right from the start that I wouldn't have any Bolshevism to report on these replacements. I doubted if they had ever heard of it. They didn't know where England was, and they probably had no idea at all about Russia. And I would have no more looked for a socialist among them than I would a Roman. They were just real Americans of the old stock, most of them like Hod Bogan, who refused to let the supply sergeant teach him to write his name because the sergeant was named Solstein and anybody could tell he was a Jew just by looking at him. If it hadn't been for me needing to make myself a friend of the first sergeant's again, I'd probably have got along with the Tennesseans like I was from the "mountings" myself.

It was a real pleasure to drill them, after the weeks of training the unruly, rambunctious Montana men and the stubborn, foreign Chicago replacements. The Tennesseans never would make much of a showing in the close-order drill, on account of the way most of them were built and because they would get the commands mixed up, just like I would in the deploying-drill; but nobody

could have tried harder or taken the training more seriously than they did. Some of the corporals like Sumovski, Karsak, and Widdy like to went into fits that first morning on the drill-field, and one time when Sergeant Shevlin was trying to make us hold a platoon front, he halted us, gave us rest, throwed his tin hat down, and jumped on it; but I got along fine with the Tennesseans because they would listen respectfully and try their hardest, even if they did get balled up.

And if anything could have pleased me more with the Tennesseans, it was to see how they throwed Sergeant Funke into a fit when we reached the bayonet period that afternoon. He'd been having his fun with me for a long time now, making me demonstrate to replacements who would rassel and fight and never take the hint to go easy and learn the science. But there was nobody like that among the Tennesseans. They didn't learn the science, but none of them would rassel and fight, neither; they would all go easy and take the science seriously when I would demonstrate the motions and holts, and I never was throwed down or got a single bruise or strain in this whole afternoon of bayonet fighting.

When he was putting them through the pointing-exercises, I thought I would bust to keep from laughing right out at Sergeant Funke. First, he had a row with them because two-thirds of them wouldn't yell, "You—damn—Boche!" and "You—God—damn—Boche!" in the bayonet fighting. Hod Bogan spoke right up to him against the cursing.

"These yere Hardshells can swear profanity without hurtin' theirselves, sergeant, mebbe," he said. "But as fer me, I was brung up a Cumberland Presbyterian; and my religion won't let me go nigh so fur in cussin' as the Hard-

shells does. So I'd be obleeged, sergeant, please, sir, if you-all'd let me yell suthin' else when I'm pertendin' 'bout the Boches!"

Sergeant Funke's face turned red as a beet, he spluttered and fumed so over it, but he had to give in, for Captain Traub himself ordered the swearing to be cut out. Well, the bayonet fighting turned into a regular joke, and that poor ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke like to have gone crazy. When he tried to make the two ranks point, strike, and pass over, there was such a ball-up that he went to raving at us corporals, and I had to do my best to keep the ranks straight and bawl the Tennesseans out seriously, though I was so tickled inside I wanted to lay down and roll and laugh.

I had troubles of my own in the deploying-drill; but the whole battalion got itself tangled into a regular mob; and the Tennesseans were blamed for it, so I wasn't any worse off than any other corporal. I felt so good over everything that I become very friendly with Hod Bogan as we marched into Houel. And he cottoned right up to me.

"Corp'ril, ain't you-all from Tenn-o-see your own self?" he asked me, when mess was over and we were back in the billet.

"No," I said. "I'm from Kansas, Hod. But my Grandpa Mattock come from Tennessee as a young man and I have quite a feelin' for your home state."

"Sho, now, corp'ril! I knowed y'all was differ'nt from these yere Dutchmen and Eyetalian corp'rils. There was some Mattocks up the branch from my neighborhood. I never knowed 'em right smart, for they war Hardshells, and pap and mam are Cumberland Presbyterians. But they mout be relations of your'n. Old Harley Mattock

was a Hardshell elder. Had the name of bein' a powerful exhorter."

"Well, is that so?" I said, mightily interested. "They might be relations true enough. Pa is a Hardshell. Ma, who was a Mount—Jurilda Mount was her maiden name—is a strict Methodist and I was brung up as one. She's tried her hardest to change Pa's religion, but that's one thing he's stubborn about. Says he'll always stick to his fambly's, which is the Hardshell. Might be the Mattocks you know are relations."

"Come to think of it," said Hod, "you-all bear a right smart resemblance to old Elder Mattock, and I wouldn't be a particle surprised——"

Well, I had settled down and was feeling absolutely delighted to get into a fine old-fashioned talk about families and relations and so on for the first time since I'd left Kansas, when an angry yell from Corporal Sumovski broke off Hod's remark.

"By God, you'll report to the supply sergeant for this detail, or you'll report to the first sergeant!" the corporal yelled. "Take your choice."

"I never said I wouldn't report," yelled back the Tennessean whose name was Bert Daggett. "I jest said if I had to take orders from furriner Eyetalian corp'rils like you-all, I'd do it, and I will. But I don't have to let Eyetalians like you snap and snarl at me that way, and I don't aim to. And if I report to the first sergeant, it'll be to ask him if I have to be snapped and snarled at by furriners, I'll tell you that."

"Hop to 'er, kid, and see what it gets you—you damn hill-billy."

"Hy doggy, I will. You-all ain't no right to be a callin' me names——"

"Huh! You never called me any, did you?"

"I said y'all was an Eyetalian furriner, and you air. And I will—I'll go see if I have to be snapped and snarled at by Eyetalian furriners——"

Bert Daggett was going down the billet ladder as he said that. I got up and left Hod Bogan setting where he was. For I remembered I was a corporal myself and had my own duties to look out for. I offered Corporal Sumovski a cigarette and made a josh or two about what fools the Tennesseans had made of themselves today; and then, without looking any more at Hod Bogan, I went down the ladder and over to the Red Bull. And the next morning, when I saw Bert Dagget getting up with a black eye and a split lip, I decided more than ever that I must remember I was a non-commissioned officer and not go to fraternizing with the Tennesseans. I should be loyal to my first sergeant, and make him realize that I was loyal and his friend.

I never had the chance until the day before the Tennesseans were sent to the front. They had two weeks of training, but nobody would ever know it to see them go through the drills. The only place where they had shone as soldiers was on the rifle range. They had made more bull's-eyes than even the Montana men. But in the other drills it was still just one ball-up after another. But the order was for more replacements, and they had to go and take the places of the gassed, wounded, and killed.

This evening after mess I was standing in the door of the billet. Over on the blankets to my left Hod Bogan, Bert Daggett, and four or five more of the Tennesseans were talking about life back in the "mountings," all of them seeming absolutely unconcerned about the fact that they were to be sent up to the Argonne fighting to-

morrow. Hod was trying to drag me into the talk, like he always was doing, for he seemed to think that I had got to be first-class friends with him that first evening in the billet, and would never understand that I had only forgot myself. I could never fraternize with him, for I was a corporal, but I couldn't make him understand it. I'd been too good-natured to tell him right out; in spite of the fact that he was so persistent and had plagued me half to death by talking about Elder Mattock, the Tennessee Hardshell, right in front of Sumovski and Karsak, I had never bawled him out. But I was about half sore at him. And I'd had to set on him a few times when he went to complaining about how the "Eyetalian" first sergeant had treated Bert Daggett. They got started on that subject now, seeming to think they could say what they pleased, just because they were going to the front tomorrow. And then they swung over to talking about the wickedness of the Romish church. When they were in the midst of it I saw First Sergeant Novak and Corporal Sumovski walking over from the supply room. They stopped at the foot of the ladder and went to gabbing. It made me think of something.

"You ought to have more respect for somebody else's religion," I said to Hod Bogan. "The first sergeant is as religious in his way as you are. He takes off his cap whenever he passes a priest on the street."

"I shorely would of expected it!" snorted Hod Bogan. "Well, these yere furriners can take off their hats. But I'll tell you! Back in the mountings sech an idolater priest wouldn't go a quarter afore summun'd lay fer him, and git him, too, hy doggy!"

"You wouldn't tell that to the first sergeant!" I yelled

at him, my blood about boiling to hear his insults and threats.

"Sho! Wouldn't I now?"

And he started to ripping it off until I lost all control of myself and yelled; "You shut up about the first sergeant! The first sergeant's a friend of mine, and I'll knock the head off anybody——"

"Y'all come on and knock, corp'ril—jest try it! I dare y'all; and I'm sayin' again if that Eyetalian first sergeant was ever ketched down in my country, he'd about get lynched and burnt——"

"By Jeez, you can gimme my needin's right here and now!" bellowed the first sergeant, who seemed to have heard my raging yells and come plunging up the billet ladder. "Roll out to the rear, many of youse as feels like 'er, you malary-bit bums! Let's go!"

"I hain't fightin' you with my fists, sergeant, sir. I hain't pinin' fer the guardhouse ay-tall."

"I ain't standin' on my rank, see! All I want is to knock your ears down!"

"Go on and do hit," said Hod Bogan. "But I hain't fightin' back. I got these boys to witness I hain't."

"Corporal!" bawled the first sergeant to me. "Take this bird to the company kitchen and put him to scrubbin' out meat sacks. Three hours' extry duty, see!"

"All right, sergeant," I said. "It made me so wild to hear him slammin' you that way I'd certainly have knocked hell out of him if you hadn't come up the ladder when you did."

"You got my permission to do it yet," growled the first sergeant. "But see that he hops to 'er on them meat sacks, anyway."

He really gave me about as friendly a look as he ever showed on his tough face, and it made me feel so good to think I'd been loyal to him and proved I was ready to fight for him, and here he was, a friend of mine again, that my rage at Hod Bogan died out and I decided not to knock hell out of him. He scrubbed the filthy meat sacks for three hours, and when I relieved him, he said in a hateful, low voice, "Think y'air purty cute, don't you, corp'ril?"

"Oh, I don't know," I came back at him.

"I 'low I do." His voice sounded more hateful than ever, and his gray eyes grew so small and hard they looked like nailheads. "Mebbe I'll ketch up with you-all agin sometime, sommers, corp'ril. Who kin tell?"

I was all over being sore about the talk he'd made against my friend, the first sergeant, but he was bound to hold a spite against me just because the first sergeant had happened to come up behind me when I was threatening to knock Hod Bogan's head off. He was venomous, that's what he was, venomous and persistent, just like all the "mounting" folks were in their feuds. And that night I must have woke up a dozen times, dreaming that Hod Bogan was coming after me with his frog-sticker.

But he didn't, and the replacements got away the next morning without me having anything more to do with him. I felt a big relief when the Tennesseans were hauled away and I knowed that now the first sergeant and I ought to be good friends again.

That night I reported to Lieutenant Dill that the only Bolshevism I had heard from the Tennesseans was their arguments against the Romish church.

"Corporal! You need not report such matters," said the little lieutenant. "The Service is not concerned with

them. I am delighted with all the reports of the Tennessee men. Corporal! If all Americans were like them, our country would have no need to fear for her future. And the army would have no need for the Intelligence Service. In the Southern mountains the fine old American ideals survive in a pure American stock. Corporal! I am satisfied with your work. You may go."

I saluted and slipped out, feeling about the best with the world that I had for many a day. Everything seemed to be going along pretty good again. Even my personal troubles looked like they might come out all right. And I was actually humming a tune to myself as I tramped around into Odile's back yard. Soldiering wasn't so bad, once you learned how.

XIV

RAINY DAYS



AINY October weather, and the Frog women and old men were carrying on their fall life as though no Americans were around. The grapes and apples were picked and new wine and cider was stewing in barrels and kegs. The big limbs of Odile's apple tree were stripped of fruit and they were beginning to scatter brown leaves in the rain. Potatoes, beets, carrots, turnips, and onions were all dug from the ground and stowed away. And there were only dead stalks in the cabbage patches. The fat grown hogs had been butchered and every part of them made into some kind of meat that would keep, from smoked hams and sides to blood sausage.

One day in middle October the farmers from miles around had brought in their horses, which the Frog army had drafted for the artillery. The farmers had raised these big, gentle, mild-eyed horses as pets; and they nearly all hugged and kissed their horses when the Frog officers took them over; and some went shuffling away in their wooden shoes, wiping their eyes with their black Mother Hubbard aprons, taking on just like they had said goodbye to their sons.

Many of these October days and nights the town square and the narrow old streets were gray and dismal with rain, and now our billets were pretty wretched and chilly, especially as there were so many leaks in the

roofs. It got muddy around the town, but the rain laid the dust and improved the gravelly soil of the drill-field.

Rain or shine, with slickers on our backs or in the packs, the training cads of the 185th marched out of Houel every day for hiking and drill. It never rained hard, but the training was rather gloomy work now, with the sky low and gray, and the woods around the drill-field dripping and dark. The replacement draft we were training now was about all New York Jews. Most of them took the training very seriously and tried to learn everything they could about how to take care of themselves at the front. They were earnest as the Tennesseans about the drill. In fact, I often got to feeling pestered by their questions, which it would make me figure like sixty to answer sometimes. I hadn't found any Bolsheviks among them yet, but I expected I would. They were nothing like so religious and patriotic as the Tennesseans. I tried talking about Kansas to one in my squad named Izzy Rose. He was very polite, but I could tell he wasn't much interested.

"Oi, chure," he said. "I've hoid of dat state. It's whur de Mormons all are. I bet youse are a Mormon, onh, coip'ril?"

So after that I would set and only listen to the New York Jews and the Chicago non-coms argue about which city had the best places for good times, which city had the best baseball teams, and so on. I could talk with Izzy about our girls, for he was crazy about my snapshots of Lola Bandon. And he would often tell me about his "goil, who woiked in a shoit factory on T'oity-t'oid Street." The rest of the squad would laugh when he talked about his "goil," on account of him being sentimental, I guess.

I got along real well with the New York Jews, in spite

of the fact that I had been brung up to look down on the Jew people as having no minds except for bargaining, and to believe they were only good at it because they were naturally so wily and slick. But these Jews were not wily and slick; they just used their heads and treated the corporals and sergeants in the best way to get along with them. I had never quite believed that I was such an extra good corporal until Izzy Rose praised me so much.

I was doing real well in about everything, and was feeling pretty fine, in spite of the dismal, rainy weather. My army troubles were fairly well settled, and it looked like the war itself would be settled before the winter was over. We knowed that the Americans, Frogs, and Limeys had about eight soldiers to the cowardly Boches' one on the front now; and we could begin to see that they were licked, and it would only be a matter of time until we would hang the Kaiser, move into Germany, and get to fight the Battle of Berlin like we had the Battle of Paris.

Everything was coming along real good, except for some trouble with Sergeant Funke, which nobody else but that hypocrite of a Hod Bogan had got me into. Two or three times, when Hod was pretending like he wanted to be friends and talk with me about the Tennessee Mattocks, I had forgot my rank as a corporal, and had talked with him more intimately than I ought. And just from a few harmless remarks that I let drop without thinking, about what a fat-faced ignoramus Sergeant Funke was, and how I might lose my temper if he didn't leave Odile alone—just from an innocent remark or two that hypocrite of a Hod Bogan had made up a yarn about how I had threatened to him that I would knock the sergeant's head off one of these days; and he had told it to Sergeant Funke the morning he went up to the front. I'd thought I was

done with Hod Bogan when I jumped him about mocking the religion of my friend, the first sergeant. But I wasn't. The hypocrite had pretended to be my friend, and then he claimed to Sergeant Funke that I had made a lot of threats.

Well, if I had honestly made what was really threats, I'd have admitted it, and I'd have lived right up to my reputation as the Kansas Cyclone. But it threw me into such a rage to learn what a hypocrite that Hod Bogan had been to me that I denied everything to Sergeant Funke, and I declared I'd half kill Hod Bogan, if I ever was to lay my hands on him again. Well, that dumb-witted, bullheaded fool of a Funke was sore because I'd got the best of him, and he took the hypocritical yarn of Hod Bogan as an excuse, and he'd been acting like a bully ever since. He couldn't ride me any harder than ever on the drill-field, but he could bring a sneer to his fat face and speak surly and tough whenever I was with the gang, and he did. He was playing a regular bully, and I felt more contempt for him than ever. But I had figured out the way to get the best of him, and it certainly did make him flush up and squirm when I would show my contempt by simply ignoring him and his bullying remarks.

I was really getting a good revenge on him, but the other non-coms didn't understand how it was; they figured that because I was a hard-boiled battler, I should fight this out with the sergeant, in spite of his rank; and though I explained about Hod Bogan's hypocritical yarn, the non-coms kept hinting more and more that I should fight. I couldn't make them understand anything.

One rainy evening after Sergeant Funke had made another winning in the pay-day crap game, he walked up to me in the mess line, and growled, "I've bought Odile a

new pair of shoes, and I'm takin' 'em to 'er tonight, see. And if you want to do what you bragged you would do, just call around, see, and you'll sure as hell get the chance."

I let on like I didn't hear him and showed my contempt by not saying a word till the sergeant had gone on to his place ahead of the corporals in the mess line.

"Well, Knockout Kansas, you goin' to take him up?" said Pete Widdy.

"I wouldn't lower myself so much," I said, with a real sneer. "Of course, I wasn't goin' to Odile's tonight, anyway. Got letters to write."

And I did need to write to Elsie Snodgrass. I hadn't wrote to her for about six weeks, and it was a shame. My conscience had been bothering me so I couldn't put it off a day longer.

Well, when mess was over and I'd written her a letter, I drifted back to the Red Bull, and Pete Widdy and the other Company F men hushed their talk suddenly as I stepped inside. I set down and was trying to figure out why they had, when Pete Widdy told me.

"We was just talkin' about you, corporal," he said. "Wonderin' how much rough-ridin' you'll stand before you buck. What say, kid?"

"He ain't give me a good honest excuse yet," I said truthfully. "I would simply be lowerin' myself to notice anything he's done so far."

"Huh!" said Horse Karsak, trying to be smart. "Say, gang, it looks like our Kansas Cyclone has turned into a sweet evenin' breeze!"

"Sweet! did you say?" said Pete Widdy, making a big fool wink.

The gang had a laugh, and I showed them that I was

good-natured enough to take a joke on myself, and I grinned, though I certainly couldn't see any sense to the joke. Then nobody else looked at me; and an argument was started about whether or not we'd get to march into Germany if the Boche was to give up; and then Doc Makin started some harmony going, and I hummed along, going really loud in the choruses. But I was extra tired and didn't feel much of a thirst tonight, so I left early.

A fairly hard wind was blowing the rain along, and up in the billet it was whining through the cracks of the old barn wall, creaking the rafters and rattling loose boards. Most of the replacements, tired out from their day's training, were in their blankets. A couple in Corporal Sumovski's squad were reading by candlelight. Another one of that squad, a young fellow named Leo Sternfeld, was scribbling in a big notebook. I never paid much attention to any of them, but just set down on my blankets and smoked a cigarette, worrying some about how contemptibler Sergeant Funke was getting all the time, until I noticed that Private Sternfeld had turned his notebook out of my sight. Then I remembered my intelligence work. I'd been suspicious of this particular New York Jew from the first. He was different from most of the others; a slim sort of a man, with a thin face, large black eyes that just glowed at you, a tall, pale forehead, and fine, curly hair. He'd never had much to say to anybody. He had seemed to be agreeable and had never done anything insubordinating that he could be bawled out for, but he certainly wasn't any shucks of a soldier. He was liked in his squad, but I decided it didn't make any difference about what else he was, I had to make sure he wasn't a Bolshevik.

"Don't you know it's against the orders for soldiers

to write diaries?" I said, using my head to lead him out.

"Oh, this isn't a diary I'm writing," he said, with a smile. "It's nothing; nothing at all."

"All right, then; let's have a look at it," I said firmly.

The glow of his eyes snapped into a glare, and his jaw set; but then he wiggled his shoulders like a Frog, and he tore the leaf out of the notebook and handed it over. It seemed to be a poem, and though I read it over for a dozen times, trying to make some sense out of it that might be called Bolshevism, I couldn't make head nor tails of it in any way. So I decided finally that it was Bolshevism anyhow. This was its words:

The year's at the fall,
The fall's at the night,
The night's at eleven,
The roofs are rain-pearled.
The priests yowl and squawl,
The white nations fight,
God snores in heaven,
All's wet with the world.

"What in thunder's it all about?" I asked at last, wanting to give him every chance in the world.

"Why, nothing, of course," said Private Sternfeld impatiently. "Just an idle bit of dogger hell. Nothing more."

"Now, looky here," I said sharply. "The first two lines are all right and plain enough. I ain't so sure about the third one, as it was nowhere near eleven when you was writing. I guess it's plain enough about the rain on the billet; but what do you mean by 'priests yowl and squawl?'"

"Not a damn thing! Make it 'cats yowl and squawl,' if you want to."

"That would have more sense," I declared. "But there's the next to the last line. It's really a bad one. 'God snores in heaven.' That's no way to write about Almighty God."

"Very well, corporal. We'll censor that line. Anything to be agreeable."

Private Sternfeld yawned then, turned his back to me, and begun to unwrap his leggins. I didn't say any more, neither; but I stuck the poem, or dogger hell, or cipher, or whatever it was into my blouse pocket and decided I'd show it to Lieutenant Dill when I reported my intelligence work the next time. That would be tomorrow night. And I made up my mind that I'd try to get my hands on the rest of that notebook. There was something mighty suspicious about a man who would set in a chilly, dismal billet and spend his spare time writing stuff which he called dogger hell. It was mysterious and suspicious, and I decided he was a Bolshevik. And my reasoning was good, as it turned out; but my personal troubles had been so strong in my mind that I'd forgot how to work like a secret service man and that secrecy was the main thing; so it was really my personal troubles which finally brought my army troubles back full force. But I didn't suspect that now, as I rolled into my blankets and called out a friendly good night to Corporal Sumovski when he came up the ladder.

Sergeant Shevlin was gone on leave now, and Corporal Sumovski was in charge of the billet. I laid and thought for a minute about how fine it was that I'd been friendly to him right along. He would be made a sergeant in the next promotions. And he was already the first sergeant's

best friend. I thought for a minute about how fine it was, and then my mind come back to my personal troubles.

I was still in trouble about Joe Beedy. He had finally answered my last letter, and I was surprised by the mean way he wrote. He said he would never have believed that old Matt would make a low-down crack like that about a wonderful girl who'd had such a tough time of it, and he declared I must have it all wrong in my head. Maybe we was both too drunk to get his story straight that night we fought in the Battle of Cognac Hill; or maybe I was drunk when I wrote such a low-down crack; and I should never write him another letter except when I was sober. Anyway, it was too late, as he had already written to the girl and told her all about what a good bunkie I'd been to him. So I might as well forget that low-down stuff if I wanted to meet up with him after the war.

Well, poor old Joe'd had another operation on his stump, and I figured he must be down in the dumps with the blues. That was the trouble and I should write him a letter that would cheer him up. So I wrote back that I understood everything now and I was ashamed of the low-down crack I'd made. I said that my conscience had been hurting me about him, and I'd thought I was writing something for his own good; but to forget it all, as he was the only real friend I'd ever known.

It was really a clever, cheery letter, but Joe hadn't answered it yet. I laid now and worried because he hadn't, as some of the other Company F men who had been wounded wrote up from the Brennes hospital; and they mentioned Joe, saying that he'd been having a time with his leg, but the stump was healing and he was getting along.

He could hardly have heard from Sade Nixon yet, I

figured. I couldn't imagine why he didn't answer my humble, cheery letter and be good friends again.

Taps sounded. Corporal Sumovski blew out the last candle. I tried to go right off to sleep, but I still laid and thought dismally in the dark, listening to the whining wind and the droning rain.

Ma's last letters had worried me considerably, as Pa had been taken with bilious fever during harvest and was still very poorly at the last writing. The crop had been good, but harvest wages were outrageous; and now the old folks had to keep another hired man right along, so they could hardly afford to send me any more money. They had finally understood from my letters that I was stationed behind the lines and wouldn't be in the fighting so long as I stayed a corporal, and they certainly were tickled to death about it, Ma especially. She wrote that she felt the Lord God was at length rewarding her for all her years of sacrifice and faith. My eyes actually got wet when I read that letter, and I swore to myself that on Ma's account, if for nothing else, I'd keep from being busted and sent to the front.

But it was another big worry about Pa being down with bilious fever, and I certainly missed the money orders and the fine suppers and wine they would buy at Odile's. And now I couldn't buy her so many of the presents which would always make her jolly and sympathetic. I might as well let her go to thunder, I decided. Let that fool of a Sergeant Funke waste his crap winnings on her, if he wanted to. It was really time for me to turn over a new leaf and reform myself anyway.

Besides, I was getting more and more sentimental about Lola Bandon. I would write her long, mushy letters, and she would kid me for all I was worth in the answers she

wrote back. I knew she thought a lot of me; I could read that between the lines. When I wrote and asked her if it was young slackers she went with on the good times she was forever telling about, she replied: "No, I hardly ever go out with anybody but my employer, and he is 'way past the draft age. And now, smarty, to get even with you for teasing, I'm going to make you tell me how many French girls you are traipsing around with."

It tickled me to think that Lola would be so jealous of the madamozels, and to know she wasn't going with any young slackers of clerks, bookkeepers, and so on, but still I couldn't help worrying about her "employer." I couldn't believe Lola was a girl who would ever really take up with an old man, but just the same, I worried.

Around in a circle, from worry to worry, my thoughts went—and then, all of a sudden, it seemed, I was rousing up, hearing the notes of first call ring down the streets. It was dark, and the wind and rain were still making their dismal sounds; but it was morning, and I'd been sleeping like a dead man.

Another day of drilling in the rain, with Sergeant Funke riding me as hard as ever in the afternoon's bayonet fighting, a hike through a chilly drizzle back to town, and evening mess. I hurried through it, like I always did when I had to take a walk to Lieutenant Dill's quarters; and the billet was empty when I put my tools away. I didn't have any other Bolshevism to report yet, so I decided I'd better make sure about Leo Sternfeld and take his notebook along, if I could find it. I did, and then I scrambled out of the billet in a hurry.

When I had come to the end of my walk and had slipped into Lieutenant Dill's billet and saluted him properly, I told him of my suspicions about Private Stern-

feld and I pulled out the notebook, and the leaf which I had got holt of the night before. The lieutenant read it first.

"Hmm. Well——" The lieutenant frowned and tightened his mouth till the corners was the shape of hooks. "What preposterous dogger hell, what an atrocious parody of Browning's immortal lyric! But what have we here?" He went to poring through the notebook; and before long he read something that made his face get the colickiest I'd ever seen it. "Infamous! The traitor!" he hissed out as he read on. And finally he jerked some leaves out of the book, threw them on the table, smacked them with his fist, and started out like he was going to orate. "America! My country! Whither are ye drifting?" But then he slumped down, shook his head like it wasn't any use, and sighed, "Scabs still drop from the skin of Ruso to contaminate—ah, I must make a note of that——" The lieutenant grabbed a pencil, scribbled on a pad of paper, then he went to reading on through the notebook.

I picked up a leaf and read it, curious to see why it had made such a stir with the lieutenant. I was simply horribly shocked at some of the things on that leaf of paper and I sneaked it into my pocket, as I happened to think it would be fine to show to the old folks and let them know how important my intelligence work was. This is what was written on the paper, in a fine handwriting:

Page 4. Mother Toil

You are God's curse, and War His love,
Yet you rule earth, in grimy state.
And men who scorn the Foe above
And bow to you, they are the great.
From you comes all our hope and worth,
Old sturdy mistress of the earth!

"Aye well, but I lack loveliness;
With sober face and awkward hands,
With droning voice, too harsh to sing—
My sons hear only dull demands.
Priests chant, drums beat, the banner waves;
War's beauty makes my sons his slaves."

If War is God, and God a Beast,
Toil, what is man, and what is life——

God is a beast. The priest his tongue. The ruler His claws
and teeth. Man His eternal prey. Sonnet idea:

God is a beast, the priest His tireless tongue.

Damn alliteration. Sound and no fire. Oh, hell. Tiresome
tongue better.

"Corporal!" the lieutenant said, looking me seriously
in the eye for the first time he ever had. "I am gratified.
You have uncovered one who is not only a Bolshevik, but
one who has the power to inflame others against every-
thing American. I shall use all my influence to have
charges preferred against this scoundrel which will send
him safely to Leavenworth. Corporal! You have per-
formed a noble and patriotic work. I congratulate you and
I thank you."

"Yes, sir," I said modestly, though I felt about as
pleased and puffed up as I ever had in my life.

"A noble and patriotic work. You are a credit to the
Intelligence Service." The lieutenant leaned back, and
I was surprised to see a smile come over his serious face.
"Corporal! I am highly pleased with you, and you shall
be the first to hear the good news—my promotion! Yes.

Tomorrow I don a captain's bars." He smiled more than ever and he looked like a baby again, only not a colicky one, but a baby that has just got a bottle of warm milk. "A captain's bars, corporal! I am to serve as regimental adjutant."

"Sir, I certainly am pleased to hear it," I said. And I really was.

"Corporal, I thank you." And now he became serious again. "Hereafter you will make your reports to Lieutenant Prouty, the new Intelligence officer. I shall especially recommend you to him. However, I wish you to continue to—eh—call at my quarters. I am still greatly interested in Company F. The regimental commander is often disturbed about the—eh—company administration. Any fraternizing between officers and men must be reported and stopped. You may report this to me."

"Sir," I said, feeling uncomfortable. "Captain Traub never even talks to any of the non-coms."

"Ah, Captain Traub." I could have sworn the lieutenant closed one of his little eyes in a fat wink. "You are shrewder than I thought. Very well, corporal. That is all."

That was all for the night; but the next morning, when the company was falling in, Johnny Hard and the first sergeant came from the orderly room with some papers, and Private Leo Sternfeld was ordered to fall out. He did, looking dazed and scared for a minute, after the first sergeant had said a few words to him; and then he began to stare at me, and his face turned so white and his black eyes got such a blaze that I couldn't keep from shuffling nervously; and when I saw him dart over and begin to talk excitedly to his bunkie in Corporal Sumovski's squad, I went to figuring, and in a minute I was cussing to myself to think what a fool I was to have said a word to him

about his notebook. If I had acted as a real Secret Service man, I'd simply have said nothing and just took the notebook when I had the chance. I hadn't figured on it, and I never thought till now that he would suspicion me about the notebook. It looked like a pile of trouble again.

The whole squad was staring down at me as Sergeant Mahler formed the company, and the scowl of the big black Polack corporal was as tough as the first sergeant's had ever been. And I realized that now I'd have to get Lieutenant Dill's permission to resign from my intelligence work and tell the non-coms all about it, how noble and patriotic it was, and how I'd tracked down this Leo Sternfeld because he was a Bolshevik and the worst one ever heard of. I'd simply have to do it, or else there was sure to be some terrible troubles ahead. I'd ask the lieutenant—or captain, he was now—this very night to be free of the work, so I could explain everything. If he wouldn't——

But that was the way it was all day: if he would, or if he wouldn't; just thinking back and forth in a torment.

Most of the time I was pretty sure he would. But he wouldn't. When I asked him, all I got was to be simply ripped up one side and down the other.

XV

THANKSGIVING



HAT have you spilled on Johnny Hard? You open up, come clean, give 'er to us straight, or by the holy old hell you'll get coldcocked so your own mother won't know you."

"Wait a minute, Novak. Hang on to yourself."

"For Chri' sake, Shevlin, let me take just a crack at him! Get one of my mitts on him, and I——"

"Lay off a minute, will you?"

"Lay off, hell! Half kill 'im and he squawks it all, I'll say."

"Oh, yeah, yeah. You're one wise guy, Novak. You want to get us all in a sling, and Johnny Hard to boot? No? All right; lay off this bird till I talk him out of it."

"Shoot your spiel then, but make 'er snappy. I'm goin' to knock this baby's ears down till they hang from his hips, and I'm rearin' to start."

"You're nuts. You don't know who you'll want to beat on, when you learn what it's all about."

"I know what a stool's got comin' to him."

"Yeah. Well, set down, Novak. I'll run this for a while."

I crouched back into the dark corner of the orderly room and felt absolutely sick as I thought how the first sergeant and Sergeant Shevlin had pretended to be my friends, lured me over here from the Red Bull after tattoo, and then started in like they were going to half kill me,

though I never had done a thing against one of them, but had only tried to be their friend.

"You tell us all you know and tell it straight, and you're Jake," said Sergeant Shevlin, in a friendlier voice.

"You don't, and Jeezus help you!" growled First Sergeant Novak.

My mouth felt dry, my heart was pounding, my mind was going in a crazy whirl, and I could only stand and swallow for a minute. It was raining out, and here in the thick dark the two sergeants loomed like a couple of giants. And I knowed at last that everything was lost. Ever since that morning Leo Sternfeld was transferred to a labor battalion there had been rumors and suspicions about the intelligence work in the regiment; and because they didn't know how noble and patriotic it was, the non-coms twisted up everything in their minds and acted towards me like I had the smallpox. And when Sergeant Shevlin had come back from his leave, he had gone about crazy when he heard that Dill and seven other first lieutenants had been promoted to captains, and Johnny Hard had been passed over, though he was senior to five of the ones promoted.

"Just one smack in the puss, and he'll talk!"

But Sergeant Shevlin held the first sergeant back.

"G'wan. You got him scared spitless already." Then he went to talking in his old friendly way to me. "Looky here, Mattock, you used to be a regular white guy, one of the real hard-boiled, straight-shootin' babies of old Company F. What the hell's got you? Somebody have a strange-holt on you some ways?"

"I guess they have, sergeant," I said, feeling encouraged by his friendliness. "I guess I was a fool and let myself be drug into a muss."

"Boy, that's sure as hell tough. Now, listen; you shoot straight with us here, tell us all you know and we'll stick by you. Boy, if you ain't got friends in your own company, General Pershing himself can't help you to live along good in the old army. You come clean, and nobody but us'll know it, and I'll stick by you till it's fini la gear. What say, kid?"

"Sergeant, if you mean did I tell anything on Johnny Hard, I swear I ain't said a word," I declared honestly.

"Come on, now. Listen. How about all these rumors that the regiment's lousy with stool-pigeons and that you're one in Company F? Come through."

I began to feel sullen and bitter as I realized that the two sergeants were going to try to make me tell all about the intelligence work, and that they were bound not to see how noble and patriotic it was; but they would call it "stooling"; and they and all the other Chicago non-coms, it seemed like, had been brung up to think what they called stooling was a crime. I couldn't figure it out and I felt absolutely hopeless. They looked on real sins, like gambling, cursing, drinking, and taking up with women, as all right; and I'd really knowed in my soul all along they would be bound to have ideas just as wrong about work that was simply secret service, and nothing else. And here it was. I felt absolutely hopeless, sullen and bitter.

"Come through, Matt. We won't get you in bad anywheres. Give us the dope on that Sternfeld guy. Everybody knows you hooked his writing. And the next morning he was transferred to a hard-labor outfit. No use holdin' out on that."

"He was a dirty traitor of a Bolshevik," I said, feeling so bitter I couldn't help it. "If everybody wants to stick up for a dirty traitor of a Bolshevik, they can do it."

"Nobody in old Company F is stickin' up for any Bolsheviks," said Sergeant Shevlin sharply. "If you had the dope on him, why didn't you hop on to him right out? He'd got his needin's quick enough here in the company. You know that. We tamed a few conshies in the old outfit. Made good soldiers of 'em, too."

I knowed it wasn't any use to say anything. He would never understand how it was with my intelligence work. And ever since that night he had ripped me up one side and down the other, I'd had a holy fear of Captain Dill. He had the same as threatened to bust me and throw me into a prisoner battalion at the front if I didn't keep on with the work.

"Corporal!" he had barked, making his most colicky frown. "You are sworn to secrecy. I tell you again you shall not evade your duty for the mere excuse that it has become disagreeable. I myself have been suspected by my fellow officers. But at the same time I have been respected for my power! Power! Corporal! Let the word inspire you. Power! Next to the names for the Christian qualities power is man's greatest word. You may be suspected, but you will be a restraining influence. I wish to hear no more complaints from you, corporal."

Well, I'd got enough power to make the two sergeants lure me into the dark of the orderly room, but it certainly looked like I would have no good from it. Sergeant Shevlin was coaxing along in his friendliest voice; but there behind him was the big skull-cracker of a Novak, looming up like a mountain in the dark.

"See here, Mattock, I figger you've been bulled into a performance you don't know the first damn thing about," Sergeant Shevlin was saying. "But there's been a bunch of dirty work, and we aim to get next to it somehow. Some-

how—get that. The best thing you can do is to say them few words that'll put us next."

"I said I never told a thing on Johnny Hard, if that's what you mean," I declared. "Sergeant, I swear I never did."

"Did Dill ever ask you about that battle?"

"Well, yes." I couldn't see any use in keeping this a secret. "In a way. When he was askin' me questions to decide if I could be a corporal, he said something about it bein' wrong for American officers to fight with enlisted men from the Frog army. But he only asked me something about did I think it was wrong. I never mentioned Johnny Hard, and he didn't neither."

"That's good. I always thought you was too fine a guy, Matt, to ever do that."

I had explained so well to Sergeant Shevlin I began to feel more hopeful and not so sullen and bitter any more.

"He never did mention Johnny Hard when he talked with you, huh?"

"No, sergeant, he never mentioned the lieutenant's name a single time; and I'm tellin' you the honest God's truth, I never mentioned it a single time, neither; I never reported a single thing, neither, sergeant, about fraternizin' between officers and men, though I knowed——"

I had got such a warm feeling thinking I was talking the sergeants out of it that I forgot myself and said more than I ever ought. And I realized it when Sergeant Shevlin broke in with a sudden sharp question: "What was you reportin', then?"

"Bolshevism," I said, feeling like I was caught hopelessly and helplessly in a trap and it wasn't any use. And I wouldn't care if he was the regimental adjutant; he

could do what he pleased with me, but I'd tell anything to get away from these sergeants. I might as well give up. They'd worm or beat everything out of me some way, anyhow.

So I did. I answered every one of Sergeant Shevlin's soft, friendly-spoken questions and the more I answered, the more I gave up, until finally I was just telling everything without no questions at all; and to cap the climax I got to feeling so sorry for myself over the way I'd been abused, put upon, and misunderstood in every way that I felt my eyes getting wet, and, I couldn't help it, everything had become so miserable when I had only tried to do what was patriotic and right that I couldn't say another word and I busted down and bawled.

I crouched down in the corner and bawled until I had to take out my bandana to wipe my eyes and blow my nose; and I hadn't heard another word from the two sergeants up till now; but now Sergeant Shevlin went to raving.

"Jeezus, oh, Jeezus! What a war, Novak! What a war, Novak! Chris', the crap that's pulled—the snivelin' bastards that do dirt and call it good because it's right or righteous—yeah, let's make the world safe for the democrats—let's sweep hell from God's fair earth—let's pull all the old crap we can think of for the glory of God—one hell of a God, I'll say, when I pipe the birds that's always rootin' for Him! Yeah, cross yourself, you lousy superstitious Hunyok—hop to 'er, if it does you any good, you damn fool! Yeah, she's a great war; and the old army, boy, how good she's growed; and the old U. S. A. Jeezus, amen, what a noble Chrischun country it's come to be! Let's go, Novak. Let's be good Americans from now on. No Bolshevism for us! From now on we

play the grand, new, patriotic, religious, upliftin' American game of snoop, spy, frame up, and stool. Yea, bo! Gimme a cigarette."

I had come back to myself when I saw that Sergeant Shevlin wasn't blaming me, even though he didn't seem to understand my intelligence work. I still crouched in the corner and waited to see what the two sergeants would do, while a light flared over their faces as they lit cigarettes. Then the first sergeant went to growling about "hammerin' hell out of this stool just for good luck," and I was feeling hopeless and sullen and bitter again till I saw that Sergeant Shevlin hadn't been putting it on about sticking to me if I told everything.

"You'll hammer up on me first," he snapped. "Boy, I mean it. Mattock's no more to blame over fallin' for that stuff than you are for thinkin' you have to cross yourself every time anybody says 'Jeezus.' We got something else to think about, anyway. Dill's after Johnny Hard. It's plain to see he's been scared so far to come out in the open with any charges against him. He's just played dirty with the old colonel. Kept the lieutenant from a shot at the front, from a promotion, and he'll have him busted if he can. We got to put the fear of God into his heart somehow. Well——"

Sergeant Shevlin took me by the arm and pulled me out of the corner.

"Haul feet, Kansas," he said. "Nobody's goin' to bother you. If you spy out a Bolshevik, go stool on him. I don't give a damn. But you make it a point to tell nothin' but Sunday school stories about Johnny Hard and the rest of us who are just bums, see. I'll keep my promise and stick by you."

I felt a tremendous relief as I hurried in what was

nearly a run, stumbling through the dark to the orderly room door. But just as I got to it, the door banged open and somebody swung in at such a rate that he bumped into me and nearly knocked me down.

"Who the hell—where's all the light? Huh—Novak? What's the big idea?"

It was Johnny Hard's voice, but it sounded thick, like he'd been drinking a lot. He had me by the shoulder, but he dropped his hand when light glowed out from the lamp on the first sergeant's desk and the lieutenant saw who I was.

"What's comin' off?" growled Johnny Hard, glaring at me with bloodshot eyes, and with the scowly, savage expression that had grown worse ever since he failed to get a promotion. "What's all the mystery?" he snapped at the two sergeants. But before either one of them could answer he stopped his glaring and let out a big laugh, though it didn't sound like he was particularly tickled. "Hey, you birds! Some news from division headquarters. The old Boche is licked and he's beggin' for an armistice! What do you know about that? 'S a fact. Fini la gear—whoopee! The news is spreadin' over town and everybody will be nuts. 'Ray for the old U. S. A.! Let's celebrate! Vasee le cognac!"

He pulled a bottle out of his overcoat pocket, banged it on the first sergeant's desk and then hit the first sergeant such a friendly lick that he was almost knocked down.

"This man's war is over," sung out Johnny Hard, and I could tell by now that he was drunk as a lord. "Seh fini pa bon. I never saw a shot fired, but I'm a hero anyway; the war babies never got my bars. We're all heroes, you lousy embuskay sergeants; le's drink to all of us heroes

who won the war with the m. p.'s and the Y. M. C. A. What do you say?"

He was twisting a corkscrew into the cork of the cognac bottle, and he squeezed his left eye down and the left corner of his lip up as he pulled the cork, like he was in a very jolly humor. But suddenly he seemed to think of something, and he tramped to the door window, pulled it open and struck out towards the Tadousac house.

"That damn woman's still on his mind; has to run tell her about this armistice business—what the hell, Novak, is the old war over? I ain't got it yet, so help me Jeezus!" Then Sergeant Shevlin noticed me, for I was still standing and gaping by the door, trying to figure out what all that Johnny Hard had said meant. "Haul feet, Mattock. Alley. And don't forget what's good for your health in this man's army."

I hauled my feet out of the orderly room and dragged them slowly down the street, though it was raining and blowing and I should have hurried to my billet. But I was thinking of a pile of things at once, and it seemed like I had to drag my feet along slow to do it. And there was a miserable sickening feeling in my stomach and a heaviness in my chest that gave me a scare for a minute as I thought I might be coming down with the flu. But only for a minute, as my talk with the sergeants rolled back through my mind and made all my ideas sullen and bitter, though my common sense told me I had come out fine, and that my army troubles certainly were settled now. They certainly were, for the Boche had asked for an armistice and that meant the war was over. It was over, and I'd come out of it safe and sound; but still I'd never wished stronger in all my army days that I'd used my

head, got exempted in the draft, and stuck with my good old folks, and such a fine, everyday Kansas girl as Elsie Snodgrass, and neighbors who would always understand me.

Drag along on the wet, rocky street, which it was too dark for me to see.

Nobody in the army had ever understood me. Sergeant Shevlin or any of the other Chicago non-coms never could. It just made me sick to think how they never had and how I had felt so low-down there in the orderly room I bawled, though I'd been proving that I'd done what was right.

Drag along around the corner of the Buson bakery. The wind struck me hard here, and in a second I was wet all over my face from the blowed rain.

The infernal war was over, but it would certainly be a long time before I could go home, and the non-coms would go on treating me like I had the smallpox, twisting everything in their minds, and never understanding me. And when I got back to the States and was discharged, I wondered if I could buck up from this sickening low-down feeling and be my old Kansas self again. There'd be Joe Beedy to think of; and what would he do after Sade told him; and there was that kid of a Lola Bandon, who was so sweet on me now—how could I make myself look like a hero to her—oh, I simply wouldn't think about it, but just make myself feel glad the war was over.

Drag and plod along around the corner of a barn like I was behind a plow.

The war was over. It was over, and now I was getting a regular disgust about being a corporal. It seemed like my stripes had brought on all my troubles. I was sick of

them. And I certainly wouldn't report a single word to Captain Dill just to keep them. It was probably right and patriotic to report Bolshevism to Lieutenant Prouty, and Sergeant Shevlin had said he didn't give a damn if I did. Yes, sir, I was sick of being a corporal. I wouldn't report anything to Captain Dill, but just stick to Sergeant Shevlin.

Up the billet ladder and over to my blankets just as taps started to blow. Most of the soldiers were covered up and snoring, but Corporal Sumovski was just rolling in.

"What do you know about it, corporal?" I said, speaking as friendly as I could to the big Polack, though he'd only been sneering at me since that morning when Private Sternfeld, the Bolshevik, was transferred. "What do you know about it? The Boche have asked for an armistice and the war's over!"

"Where'd you get it? From your friends at regimental headquarters?"

"No," I said, not paying any attention to his sneer. "I was havin' a friendly talk with Novak and Shevlin in the orderly room, when Johnny Hard came in with the news. That's where I got it."

"You was with who?"

"With Novak and—well, here comes Sergeant Shevlin now. Ask him."

Well, he did; and then Karsak came up the ladder; and everybody roused up, all excited and asking questions until the billet was in a regular uproar and an m. p. bawled up from the street to quiet down. But there was low talk and laughing all around, even when I went to sleep. And I was feeling some better when I did, for Sergeant Shevlin had been friendly, and when all the uproar was going on about the armistice, Sumovski and

Karsak had talked to me like maybe I didn't have the smallpox.

The armistice had really done a lot for me, I found out in the days that followed. In the excitement of the news and then in the celebration when the armistice was really signed, everybody got fairly good-natured with me again. Then a Pennsylvania draft come in, and as the New York Jews had never been sent up, we had nearly five hundred men in the company to handle. There were all kinds of rumors about whether we'd be sent back home right away or go into Germany; and then all the non-coms went to planning a big Thanksgiving supper at the Red Bull; and everything about me had sort of died down in all these happenings, so that I was asked to put in my twenty francs for the dinner, with all the other non-coms.

That made me feel real good again, though I had never quite got over the miserable, sickening experience of feeling so low-down that night in the orderly room, and I would often think sullen and bitter thoughts about it. But still I had been feeling so good about everything that I kept away from Captain Dill's quarters until he called me around one night and questioned me very sharply. He hadn't seemed to like my answers, for he suddenly yelled out in the peevish, whiny voice that I used to hear on the drill-field, "Enough of this beating about the bush! Corporal, you know your duty. And if you wish to go home with the rank of corporal, you had better be true to it. I know what's going on in your company and I intend to have honest reports on it. You know that a certain officer is misconducting himself. He drinks heavily, the French are gossiping about his affair with a café woman and a girl who lives near your orderly room, and he fraternizes with his sergeants. If it continues, charges

will be brought against him. You will be called upon to relate your knowledge of one disgraceful event. But I want still more evidence. And you must not be ungrateful, but remembering all I've done for you, do your duty, and report what you know. I'm going to have loyalty or know the reason why."

I had only told him yes, sir, and he had fired me out without making any of his speeches, swelling up and sticking his right hand inside of his blouse, as he usually did. I couldn't help but worry over it a lot, with Captain Dill pulling me one way, and Sergeant Shevlin another; and I don't know what might have come of it, if it hadn't been for Sergeant Funke getting drunk and so venomously hard-boiled the night of the Thanksgiving supper.

The money for the feast had been turned over to Madam Rose, and she had bought ten turkeys, some cranberries, thirty gallons of powerful old vin roosh, and all the trimmings for a regular American Thanksgiving dinner. Madam Odile and another madam helped her cook it and get it served out on the tables in the back room of the Red Bull. All of us non-coms gathered at seven o'clock and the doors were closed to anybody else. I was actually feeling something like my old army self as I set down at the long table with the noisy gang, took a look at the other two tables, which with ours made a kind of square, open at one end, smelled the smoke of the roasted turkeys, feasted my eyes on the red cranberries, the white mashed potatoes, the brown, bubbly mushroom sauce, the golden, freckled open faces of real punkin pies, and the kegs of wine setting on a little table in the middle of the square.

Everything started fine. All the dinner was on the tables, as we wouldn't allow any fooling with Frog courses. The madams brought each man a bottle of the

rich old wine. The sergeants tackled the carving of the turkeys, which laid in platters with their fat sides swelled out from chestnut stuffing and with their plump legs pointing to the low, black ceiling.

Candles sputtered in wall brackets and their light flickered over the loaded tables and the fifty hearty men in O. D. uniforms. Hobnails scraped on the tile floor as we unbuttoned our blouses, settled ourselves, and took the first juicy, flavory bites. The talking and laughing died down, but there was a smile on every face, and already every face began to get a rosy glow on it. The three madams, all starched up in white aprons, whispered and smiled to each other as they looked on. Sergeant Shevlin said they hadn't figured out yet what American saint it was we were having such a "grand fate" about.

I certainly did have a blissful half-hour then, one of the finest I'd ever knowed in the army. Both the dark meat and the white meat were sweet and fat, and the chestnut stuffing, the mashed potatoes, the mushroom sauce, the sourish cramberries, and the hot biscuits and sweet butter, all mixed together in bulging mouthfuls, made the most delicious combination of flavors a body could imagine; and to wash one of these mouthfuls down with a swallow of coffee, to feel it spreading so warmly and softly inside, then to take a swallow of tingly wine, which made the feelings inside still warmer and glowier and which made your mouth dribble and your eyes mist with appetite again, while the sounds of hearty chewing and sighs of pure pleasure come from all around the tables—it was simply wonderful, and I forgot every trouble I'd ever had in my life. For that half-hour, anyway.

But the wonderful eating had to come to an end, of

course; and we finally ate to a point where the platters and bowls were all empty and there were only stacks of bones around each plate to show for the great Thanksgiving dinner. Then everybody leaned back and loosened their belts for more comfort, and went to smoking, and drinking coffee with cognac in it.

When the cigarettes were smoked the wine bottles were filled again, and the harmony began to rise.

I was in such a glorious glowing humor that I joined in the harmony louder than I had for months. I just made my bass roar out and forgot that any of these sergeants and corporals had ever sneered at me for not tackling Sergeant Funke and because they hadn't understood my intelligence work. I pounded the table with my fist and sang away just like I had used to when I was a real hero with the old Company F. I even got so inspired I was leading and picking the songs we should sing. When I'd finished with "Home, Boys, Home, it's Home We Ought to Be," I stood up, waved my bottle to keep time, and simply roared out the first verse of one of our best harmonizing songs:

"Oh, I placed a white lily in her fingers,
And I placed a hot kiss upon her brow!
Oh, my Lulu's gone to live among the angels,
And I ain't got no lady-love now!"

I simply roared it, and most of the others roared it so after me that we made the windows rattle. I was warmed up all over when I took a breath to start on the second verse, but Sergeant Shevlin sung out, "Hey Matt, don't be so loud. You'll have the m. p.'s on our tail. Set down!"

And then that contemptible venomous Dutchman of a Sergeant Funke had to show that he was drunk as a fool,

and all his spite against me for getting the best of him with Odile so many times come to the top. He bawled out so that everybody could hear him; "Yeah! Set down, Mattock! And get a stool for yourself. A stool is what *you* need to set on!"

There was a second or two so quiet I could almost hear my heart pound; then some idiot, Horse Karsak or somebody, snickered, then a few laughed, and finally everybody was roaring and laughing. My spirits sunk down to nothing that quick and I wished I could drop through the floor as I realized they were all thinking about my intelligence work, which they all called stooling and looked on it as a crime. I knowed I was right, but I could never make them understand how, and so my feelings sunk that quick and got sullen and bitter, even while Sergeant Shevlin was calling Funke down.

"Lay off him," growled the sergeant. "The war's over. Forget it. Shut that mouthy Dutch face of yours."

But Sergeant Funke was so venomous drunk he was bound to carry it on and show off before everybody.

"Shut up, hell!" he bawled across the table at Sergeant Shevlin. "When did you put yourself on guard over this lousy bum of a stool, huh?"

"Say, Funke, if you're lookin' for trouble with me, we'll go to the rear right now!"

"I'll go with this damn stool quick enough!"

I was still standing up, and Funke got up, too, and bawled drunkenly for me to come on if I felt like it.

I just stood there, feeling myself burn all over, but with the fine Thanksgiving dinner turning to cold lead inside. Everybody was staring at me. But it seemed like I simply never could make a move. Funke took a step towards me, but still I could only just stand there.

"Can it!" ordered Sergeant Shevlin, grabbing for Funke's arm.

But he was too late. The venomous fat-faced Dutchman was snarling like a mad dog, and suddenly he made a lunge, and his fist swung up, and my eyes went shut as something hard raked along my ear, and when I snapped my eyes open there was the big sergeant falling against me. His fat pink face had turned a fiery red, his mouth was twisted into such a snarly expression that all of his upper teeth showed, and not three inches away from mine. For a second I felt like I had one time when I nearly drowned, as his hand grabbed my throat, and I went to choking, yelling and clawing like I was sure I'd die; and when that second was over, I didn't remember a thing that had happened; but there was Funke groaning on the red tile floor, pawing at his bloody chin, and the glass of a smashed bottle scattered around him. Odile came running with a towel. The stairway door opened.

"Wha's in hell 'sall th' rough-housh, huh?"

And there was Johnny Hard, hanging on to the door knob, swaying from side to side in his shirt sleeves, his eyes bloodshot, and his hair in a tousle over his forehead.

"Wha's trouble, sergean'? Oh, 's tha' damn fightin' Ka'sas fool, 'gain. Ha! Ha!"

Madam Rose tried to push him back up the stairs, but he shoved her away, staggered over to the table, and set down, mumbling something about "gonna have some turkey, or raish hell. 'S me, Johnny Hard, alla time, shee!" I saw it all like I was in a trance, and then I felt myself yanked out of the room, and Sergeant Shevlin and the first sergeant were growling and swearing at me from both sides.

"You're confined to quarters. Get me?" said the first

sergeant. "And get this! If youse pipe a word to that runt of a regimental adjutant, you'll go to Leavenworth! About Johnny Hard, I mean. We'll soak you for fair. Love the chance. Anyhow, you're due for a bust. Sockin' a sergeant with a bottle! Get to your quarters and stick there."

"Aw, Chris', don't be so rough." Shevlin took my part. "Funke started it. The dirt's all been done, Novak. Let's lay off. It's fini la gear. Now, looky here, Mattock, you just set tight and say nothin'. Nothin', savvy voo. You'll get a bust, but you'll be a damn sight better off. You won't get court-martialed——"

"Hell he won't!" said the first sergeant savagely. "If he don't play ball——"

"Lay off him, I told you. Boy, I'll stick by you. Just keep your mouth shut and say nothin'. The top'll put you on permanent k. p. till we start for the States. You'll be better off. What say?"

"Well, I will—I'll do anything if I don't have to go to Leavenworth," I said, though my throat was so hoarse I could hardly talk. "Sergeant, I'll do just anything!"

"All right. Beat it to quarters."

Dragging my feet along through the blowed rain. On to my quarters. The rain wetting my face, my hobnails grating along the rocks, shutters rattling on the old Frog houses, and me hearing and feeling all this on the outside; but on the inside I was honestly feeling and knowing nothing at all. Though my stomach felt heavy as lead, I didn't even remember that I had just eat a real American Thanksgiving dinner.

XVI

K. P. AGAIN



VENING mess on Christmas day. Five hundred men were lined up in two rows outside the company kitchen. Half of them were the New York Jew replacements and half were the soldiers from the Pennsylvania coal-mining country, who had come to Houel after the armistice. The soldiers all had on their overcoats, and most of them wore woolen gloves, and they switched the cold mess tools from one hand to another as they waited.

The rainy days had turned to freezing weather, and this Christmas week it had been snowing. Not heavy, blizzardy snow like I used to know in Kansas, but just light swirly puffs that finally spread a thin white sheet over the frozen ground.

Twilight was coming on. Standing at a mess table, a big kettle of hot tomatoes in front of me, a ladle in my hand, I could see out through the open side of the serving-shed. There had been a dull red over a patch of woods a while ago, when the sun went down. Now the woods was just a black splotch against the low dusty-looking sky, and between the woods and the houses of the town the fields were a smoky white. The old houses along the street, with their doors and shutters closed, appeared dismal and deserted. The curls of smoke from the chimneys hardly showed against the gray of the sky. Over a couple of walls I could see the big, bare limbs of Odile's apple tree.

Cracks and specks of light in the window shutters began to show brighter as the twilight came on. Every house had life in it, all right. And a couple of months would go by, the snow would melt, and there would be plowing and planting, leaves of grass coming green, chickens hatching out, sows littering, mares foaling, cows calving, and wheat sprouting all over this Frog country, just as they had done for hundreds of years. The war would only be something to gossip about with these Frog people, and they'd soon forget us Americans, just as they hadn't paid us much mind while we were here. And where would we all be in the spring? And what would we be doing? Me, in particular. Oh, thunder, I didn't want to think about it. But I forever and always was.

The range fires glowed redder back in the dimness of the company kitchen. There was a heavy stamping all along the two lines, and the cold and hungry soldiers began to whine and growl. The slum and bread were on the tables, and now the other k. p.'s brought up the boilers of coffee.

"All set?" Mess Sergeant Hoeffler asked the cooks. "Well—let's go!"

I never looked above the mess kits as I turned a ladle of tomatoes into the lid of each one. It was just up with one steaming, red ladleful, twist it over into a lid, and down for another one until the last lid had slid along.

The first men would soon be back for seconds, and us k. p.'s stood and waited. The twilight settled mighty fast. The eating soldiers in the big yard, setting on their overcoat tails, in bunches mostly, with their heads bent over their chow, were dim, hunched shapes among the light flakes of swirling snow. They didn't talk, but ate in a great rush to get back for seconds. Every so often one

would rip out a cussword as he burned his mouth on an aluminum cup, which would keep hot after the coffee was cold. The seconds line was soon beginning to form. Fifteen minutes later the boilers were all empty.

In lantern light we k. p.'s washed the boilers, scrubbed the tables, swept the kitchen and serving-shed floors, and brought water and cans of bacon in for the next morning's mess. There was a dozen of us on permanent k. p. We would be kept at the kitchen work until the regiment, with its five thousand replacement troops, started for home. Because the company was really half a battalion now, Mess Sergeant Hoeffler had asked for a permanent k. p. crew, so that he could organize the kitchen work to a better advantage. This permanent k. p. was supposed to be a soft job for a private. There was still six hours a day of drilling and hiking, and it was miserable in the windy, freezing, snowy weather. The k. p.'s worked in the comfortable kitchen and had their beds in the warm loft over it. Most of them were replacement soldiers who'd had some experience as cooks and waiters. I should have felt good over having the soft job. And I did feel comfortable about it whenever the company was out drilling in a storm. But I was feeling somewhat mournful this Christmas night. The Company F non-coms were having another big dinner in the Red Bull, and I was scrubbing tables and boilers, slopping around. I wasn't a corporal any more.

No, that was all over and done with. I was comfortably fixed, for I could keep to myself most of the time. I never said a word to anybody, and the other k. p.'s left me alone. The non-coms had got so they minded their own business, and they would never say a word to me any more as they come through the chow line. Well, I wasn't

asking them to. When I was busted from a corporal, I had taken Sergeant Shevlin's advice to crawl into a hole and pull the hole in after me. And now I was pretty well settled and wasn't caring about anybody or anything, except when the mess sergeant would bawl me out on account of it being so hard to keep myself shaved and cleaned up in this cold weather and at this sloppy work.

The two sergeants had worked everything with Captain Traub so that it was hushed up about the trouble at the Thanksgiving dinner. I was reduced to a private, and that venomous ignoramus of a Sergeant Funke got what was coming to him when he was let out of the hospital, for the captain had him transferred to a casual company that was going home. He never did get to see Odile again. And it was Horse Karsak who had bought her a pair of overshoes for a Christmas present.

But I wasn't caring much about the fool of a sergeant, or Odile, or who was buying her presents now, or anything else, except to be let alone. Something had happened to Captain Dill; for the night after the order went to regimental headquarters for me to be reduced, the little regimental adjutant called me to his quarters and promised that if I would tell everything I knowed about Johnny Hard, I shouldn't lose my stripes; but I was sick of my stripes and I could only feel sullen and bitter and stubborn and I wouldn't say a word. But I told Sergeant Shevlin what the captain had promised me. I didn't know whether the two sergeants and Johnny Hard lured the little adjutant into a dark corner or not, but he never even looked at me a couple of days later when I happened to pass him on the street. He never even returned my salute, but just gazed the other way, and drew his lower lip over his upper one and pulled the corners of his

mouth down till they were like hooks. But I never cared. I was sick and disgusted with everything.

As for Johnny Hard, he always stepped with a mighty swagger when he come along the streets nowadays. He didn't look so scowly and savage any more, but his eyes were always bloodshot and it appeared kind of drawed and strained around his mouth. Everybody knowed he was drinking furiously all the time. That night at the Red Bull it had taken five of them to get him back up to bed; and after they'd fought him for half an hour trying to hold him down, Sergeant Shevlin swore he'd bleed him if he didn't quiet down; and finally he had to bleed the lieutenant, and that quieted him for the night. Johnny Hard had never got so crazy drunk since, but he was hitting up the cognac all the time. And ever since the Busons and Tadousacs had learned the news about Black Jean having done something or other to be sentenced to six years at hard labor by a Frog army court martial, Johnny Hard had been getting himself in stronger with the yellow-headed, warm-eyed Junie. Madam Rose was wild about it, and so was Junie's ma. I heard the gossip and rumors and expected trouble. But I didn't care. I didn't want to be bothered by anything so long as I was left alone.

And now it was Christmas night, but I wasn't caring anything about it except that I had got through the day without being crabbed at by the mess sergeant on account of it being so hard to keep cleaned up at this sloppy work.

When the work was all done, the cook's and k. p.'s set around the warm ranges and ate some peach pies which Tommy Garou, the baker, had made for a Christmas treat. Everybody but me was talking about what the folks at home were doing this Christmas night, and how soon

would we start back for the States. I kept quiet, like I usually did now.

When I had swallowed the last crumb of pie and was putting my mess tools away, Doc Makin came in to get some sugar. Madam Rose wanted to make some mulled vin roosh for the non-coms, who had just finished a wonderful dinner, he said. Doc was still pretty friendly to me and would sometimes tell me how crazy he was to get back to the little woman in Niles, Michigan, and to be working at his chiropractor's trade instead of cooking. I would appreciate his friendliness and listen; but still I expected he didn't understand me, neither, so I never showed him Lola's snapshots any more or talked sentimentally; but I just listened and kept quiet, like I did with everybody else.

Doc joshed and laughed with the bunch for a while, then he left with his sugar, and the other cooks and k. p.'s went to stringing away until finally I was left alone in the kitchen. I set on for a good while, gazing into the coals that glowed under the stove door, and thinking on in a drowsy way about nothing in particular. Then I stretched and yawned, rose up and climbed to my billet, where I put on my overcoat and cap and took from under a loose tile what was left of the Christmas money that had come from home three days ago. I'd decided to have a real time with it tonight, as there wasn't any taps, and the soldiers could stay out as late as they pleased, so long as they were not raising hell.

Out in the streets the night was as black as the inside of a cow, but I could feel the snowflakes stroking my face and I could see lights shining around as I tramped along. The cafés were jammed with soldiers, and I was continually bumping into bunches of them in the dark. As I

tramped past the Red Bull, I could hear sounds of harmonizing in the back room. I shut my ears to it and hurried on—on past regimental headquarters, on down the street that run to the cannery, up a crooked alley, then down to a cellar place that the soldiers had nicknamed "The Bucket of Blood."

An old man and woman, who looked like rats had been eating at them, run the place, and they had three madamozels they called their daughters, who were tough as devils and who had learned more American cussing than I knowed myself. The Bucket of Blood was really a miserable dirty hole, but I could get cheap cognac there and a kind of fiery liquor that looked like water and was called ody vee, and I would never meet any Company F non-coms around the place. I had spent all my pay-day in the Bucket of Blood, and now it seemed like the only place where I could have a good time by myself and spend my Christmas money.

I performed around with one of the tough devils of madamozels for a while, and then I set in a corner and supped cognac, watching the soldiers come and go. They were mostly coal-miner foreigners and they actually behaved scandalously; but I was hardened to this by now, so I just set and supped cognac, felt drowsy and comfortable with the hot glow that come from it, and gazed through the smoky light and watched the soldiers rough-house the madamozels and come in and out of the side rooms with them. I set there and drank and looked on until I begun to feel heavy-headed, and kind of dizzy at the stomach. It was about midnight and I decided I'd had a good enough time in the Bucket of Blood this Christmas night, so I pulled out.

I was pretty well loaded, but still I wasn't feeling extra

joyful. It seemed like I never would learn to have a real good time by myself. I had to talk and laugh with a gang, harmonize and crack jokes, or performing simply wasn't any pleasure at all. But the cold air outside freshened me up until I felt fairly lively, and I thought, "Oh, well, I'll go up and get right to sleep, and in the morning I guess it will seem like I had a pretty wild old night of it, after all."

Usually I'd have gone back by the Red Bull, as it was the shortest way to the company kitchen, but I didn't want to hear the non-coms, if they were still at their celebration, so I went around the long way by the street that passed the Houel Romish church. The priests were holding a big midnight service. Soldiers were streaming in with the Frog people, and I stood and watched for a spell. Every time the doors opened I could see it looked handsome and bright inside. Then I heard some solemn music and what sounded like gospel singing. And I was tempted.

It wasn't really temptation, I guess, for I was so lost by this time that the Old Nick never bothered to tempt me any more. I just did what I felt like and never had a religious qualm. Even my conscience had quit bothering me so much, especially since the last letter from Joe Beedy, in which he called me his old bunkie again. It was a short letter, and pretty sad to read, for the doctors had operated on his stump again, and he wasn't getting along so well as he ought. But the letter was long enough to tell me that Sade Nixon had never let on about me in whatever answer she had written to Joe; for he wrote he was glad I was sorry for having made such a low-down crack and he was sure old Matt's heart was in the right place. That letter had quieted my conscience a lot.

But my conscience bothered me some now as I felt my feet moving towards the Romish church. It told me that my old folks' hearts would be broke if they ever found out that I had set foot in a Romish church; but I argued to my conscience that I had done other things which would break their hearts, if they was to learn them; so I went on inside.

The church was full of idols, just as I had always heard tell that Romish churches were, and the gospel singing was about the only thing that reminded me of a Methodist church at all. Even in it the congregation didn't join, and nobody lifted a shout at the end of a hymn. Then the priests and some boys came out, all dressed in fancy gowns, and they lighted candles around the idols. Then the main priest began to speak a sermon in a foreign language, and he made all kinds of motions and bows before the idols, and the congregation would bow and make motions, too. I was shocked to see that the idol-worshipping was exactly as the Methodist revivalists had always described it, and that it was carried on without a particle of shame. But I was only shocked for a little while. My own religion was so completely gone, and my conscience had quieted down so much, that pretty soon I began to enjoy the idolatry; and the idols, with candles at their feet, began to appear handsome; even the priest's voice had a rich sound to my ears as he rolled out the foreign words, while the congregation sung responses back at him.

I must have set there half an hour. I was feeling quite sentimental at last and had a lot of pleasant, comforting thoughts about the home folks and Lola Bandon, and every scruple of my conscience was gone.

Then the priest turned about and the people began to crowd up the aisle towards him, and then come back one

by one with their hands together in front of them. I couldn't see what the ceremony was, but I did notice Madam Tadousac coming back down the aisle alone; and I was wondering where Junie was, when I saw First Sergeant Novak and Corporal Sumovski behind the madam, and I decided I didn't want them to catch me in their church. They hadn't ever noticed me for a long time, and I was glad of it. I got up and left, so that they wouldn't notice me now.

The cognac was wearing off, and I felt pretty heavy-headed as I come outside. I yawned and stretched a couple of times, then I started for the company kitchen. The night was windier and snowier than ever, and I turned up my overcoat collar and stuck my hands in its pockets as I tramped up the street. I turned the corner, and plodded along with my head tucked down against the wind until I was passing the orderly room. Then I heard the Tadousac gate opening behind me. I turned and looked. A woman, Madam Tadousac, it appeared like in the dark, was locking the gate from the inside. Then she went on a run for the house. I felt curious, and I turned back to the gate, pressed my face against the bars, and tried to see through the stormy dark.

It was not till I heard the whole story told by Sergeant Shevlin in Brest that I learned how everything really happened. All I knowed now was that Madam Tadousac had been at the mass alone, and that it seemed she had come home in a mighty hurry. I could see a woman's shape dimly at the door. She appeared to be slipping in as quietly as she could, for I never heard a sound.

A long, long time, it seemed like, then two upstairs shutters were suddenly crashed open, and I saw the shape of a man climbing out through the window, hanging by

his hands, and then dropping to the ground. I lost sight of him in the blackness of the house wall.

Somebody started to close the shutters. A light flared up, and I saw Junie Tadousac. She was in a nightdress. She made a sharp turn just as I saw her in the glow of light; and there was her mother, holding a lamp. They went to jabbering Frog talk like they were both furious; and suddenly Madam Tadousac stepped away with the light and set it down; and then she made a dive for something on the floor, with Junie clawing after her.

For I don't know how long it was a regular fight over what appeared like a wad of clothes. They swung and swayed over against the window, and then I saw it was an army blouse. At that I begun to figure out what had happened and who that man was over there against the black wall of the Tadousac house.

At last Junie turned loose a regular screech, seized her mother's hair with both hands, jerked her over, and went down on top of her, out of sight. In a second she came up, with the blouse in her hands. She pitched it out of the window. And looked down for a second, the lamplight shining over her wild yellow curls and white neck. She sort of sobbed out a "Juh tame!" and something or other else. The shutters slammed. And there was just the stormy dark around the Tadousac house.

Then I heard fast footsteps going towards the orderly room. They stopped at the window. I crawled against the stone post of the gate, and just stood there, not being able to think of a thing to do, I'd been so excited and surprised. In a minute the orderly room door opened and Johnny Hard, with his blouse and Sam Brown belt on, strode by me, not a dozen feet away.

"Jeezus damn me! Jeezus damn me!"

I heard that groan sound back on the wind. Then even the grind of his steps on the rocky street died away.

"Soldier——" My heart seemed to jump down under my ribs as I heard that word spoke from the dark behind me. "—you are a witness. I am an officer and I demand your name!" The voice was shaky, but I knowed that cranky whine. Dill! Captain Dill, the—a hand touched my arm, and it was like someone had jabbed me with a red-hot needle; and away I went like a scared rabbit, tearing around the corner of the Buson bakery so fast that I nearly throwed myself head over heels, and that whining, shaky call dying away behind me: "Halt, soldier—soldier, I'm an officer—halt, soldier!"

I tore around my old billet and on to the company kitchen and up to the loft as hard as I could go. I crawled into my blankets without taking off any clothes, and I laid there with my heart pounding like fury until I knowed I hadn't been followed. Then I took off my wrap leggings and shoes, and I felt so relieved that my fool curiosity hadn't brought me back into trouble again that I drowsed right off and slept like a log until one of the cooks shook me awake in the morning.

Three days later Johnny Hard was suddenly transferred to division headquarters at Saguenay. There was some gossip among the cooks about how Madam Tadousac had gone to the colonel and told some kind of a story on the lieutenant. That was supposed to be the reason for his transfer. Captain Dill wasn't mentioned about it at all. I could have told them a few things, but I kept quiet. Experience had learned me a lot. A while back I'd have bragged around about how the lieutenant would probably have been court-martialed and busted if I hadn't broke and run. But experience had learned me better. I just

scrubbed boilers and tables and kept my mouth shut.

After Christmas and New Year life got duller and gloomier every day for Company F, for the replacements, the non-coms, and everybody else. The cold, cloudy weather never let up, and, while it would have been called a mild January in Kansas, still it was wintery enough to keep snow on the ground and to make you shiver and chill when you was out in the wind too long.

I could tell that nobody got any kick out of the drilling any more, as the non-coms didn't have the spirit to ride the replacement privates, and Captain Traub didn't have it in him to be a leading company-commander like Johnny Hard used to be with old galloping Company F. Even among us permanent k.p.'s we could feel the let-down getting lower and lower every day. All anybody thought about was just to eat, drink, sleep, and stay alive somehow until the orders would come to move for home. Everybody, almost, was continually crabbing. And got to hating everything about the war like fury. Except the Boche. It was strange, but we would read in the *Stars and Stripes* and the Paris American papers about what a wonderful time the Army of Occupation was having in Germany; and where everybody had used to rave and swear about the cowardly Boche baby-killers, now they were saying that the Dutchmen were probably the best people in Europe, after all. But everybody was disgusted with the Frogs and Limeys, and many would declare right out that they'd go to jail before they'd fight in another war, unless it was to fight France and England, and they wouldn't need to be drafted for that. Whoever was doing intelligence work for Lieutenant Prouty certainly had a job on his hands; for cussing the army, the government, and the allies was about all you could hear around the billets and

in the chow-lines. And instead of being patriotic about how our President had come over to show the Frogs and Limeys the right way to make peace, even the non-coms were gossiping the scandalous stories about how he was performing during his spare time in Paris.

I never took part in any of this myself. I just peeled spuds, toted coal, dished out chow, scrubbed tables and boilers, washed dishrags and meat-sacks, and tried to keep myself clean enough from the sloppy work so that the mess sergeant wouldn't bawl me out. I just did my work and drank cognac and ody vee whenever I could. I could hardly imagine myself ever getting excited or anything any more, not even about going home. I hadn't written a line since I lost my stripes. At first I was ashamed to sign myself "Pvt. Parvin Mattock"; but after while I'd got so I simply didn't care enough to take the trouble to write.

So I just drifted along in that kind of dazed way until the morning in the middle of February when we were lined up in the town square, all in heavy marching order; watching the supply company load our barracks bags into trucks and waiting for the "Squads Right!" that would start us over the snowy road to Saguenay.

When it sounded and we wheeled off in a column of squads, I didn't feel any real joy at all, but only a disgust with the Frog town and all I had knowed there. I saw Odile among the Frogs on the sidewalk, but I wouldn't look at her as we marched along. I was just as disgusted with her as I was with everything else in Houel; and now she seemed only like a fat, middle-aged woman who ought to be threshed for performing with soldiers the way she had.

"The sooner I forget this lousy burg the better I'll like

it," said one of the k.p.'s as soon as the command was "Route step."

"I hope to spit in your mess-kit!" somebody in my rank sung back at him.

"What you sayin'?" called somebody from the squad behind.

"He said we was sayin' goodbye to hell itself!" bawled a big k.p. in the rear rank of our squad.

And yells and talk run down the column: "I'll tell the cockeyed world he said it!" "Yeah, oo hell's the name for that burg." "Any other Frog burg, I'll say." "Wait'll we tell 'em at home what it was America saved from the Kaiser!" "I ain't kickin'. They's nothin' slow about the bon cherry madamozels, anyhow." "No, oh, no! Not to hear *you* tell it, they ain't!" "Boy, I'm t'ru! Onc't I set me dogs on old T'oity-t'oid Street again, it's fini gear for good." "'Atta boy, Izzy! You said it. I'm wit' yah."

"Lay offa that stuff, you birds!" some sergeant bawled.

It wasn't Sergeant Shevlin, for he had been detached from the company and kept behind at regimental headquarters because he could talk Frog so well.

I hadn't taken any part in the disgusted yells and talk, and I didn't take any part when Doc Makin from back in the cook's squad started a song:

"Home, boys, home, it's home we ought to be,
Back again in the land of liber-tee!
Oh, we'll hist Old Glory to the top of a pole,
And we'll all re-up—in a pig's — —!"

I just tramped along and bent over and tried to keep my heavy-marching-order pack riding as easy as it would.

After while everybody else was doing the same thing.

On each side of us tall, bare poplar trees shivered in the breezy cold. Miles ahead the two rows of trees and the snowy strip of road between narrowed to a point against the cloudy, gray sky. Everybody tramped on towards that point. Nobody hardly ever looked over at the white farm fields beyond the poplars. And nobody looked back.

XVII

BLACK JEAN



HERE were two stoves in the barracks, and a gang of gossiping soldiers around each one. Seven of the non-coms were strung around a lower bunk, starting on the poker game which they would play all night. Here and there, both in lower and upper bunks, the New York Jew privates were laying and talking lazily to one another; and here and there were soldiers like me, who were just laying and waiting and thinking their own thoughts. Whenever a door opened, I could see the eternal gray drizzle, foggy-like in the light that beamed from above the barracks door outside, and the shine of a wet duckboard over the sloppy mud.

It was the embarkation camp at Brest. We had waited up in the terrible tent-camp for a week. We had waited down here in one of the corrugated-iron barracks for ten days. Just waited, and it was infernal.

I yawned and stretched again, for about the fortieth time since evening mess, shut my eyes, and was thinking something about Ma cooking hot cakes at breakfast time, something about Pa watching the Holsteins as they switched their tails, licked their shoulders, and fed in the blue-grass pasture at home, something about Lola Bandon out enjoying herself in a park, setting on a rock and smiling up at somebody, the sunshine in her hair and eyes, something about poor old Joe Beedy still thinking my heart was in the right place, even if nobody else did,

something about how infernally thirsty a man could get for cognac when he was out of francs, something about how I needed to really stir myself tomorrow and clean up and talk the camp supply-sergeant into giving me a new uniform in the place of mine, which had kitchen grease all over it—all my thoughts were just drowsing around in a sluggish way, like they usually did now, when I was roused by a rumpus among the poker players. The first sergeant, Corporal Sumovski, Corporal Widdy, and half a dozen others were yelling, "Yay, Shevvie, old kid! When'd you get into this God-forgotten hole?" "How's the old kid?" "What's the news of Houel?" "How's Fabienne, you devil?" "T'ell 'ith the madamozels! How's Johnny Hard?" "Yeah, how's he come out with Pickle Dill?" "Come on, you old sonvabish, and let's hear everything!"

"'Lo, gang. God-forgotten hole is right! And so's got in—me, I got in two ways—into camp, and then I slipped off a duckboard and damn if I didn't get into mud navel-deep. Well, we're all here: 1st Battalion, Supply Company, and Headquarters. And so's Pickle Dill. What do you know about—damn if he didn't get himself to be the feeansay of our nice Y lady, Miss Pilsner-Orting. And he done it when he had a shiner and a swelled nose. Gang, you ought to see him. Ain't altogether yet. Said he fell off the bridge over the canal. Hoh, Jeezus! Let me laff!

"Yeah, I'll tell it. Wait a minute. How's the old gang? Thought you'd be in Hoboken by now. Gimme a shamoe cigarette, somebody."

Sergeant Shevlin set himself on the side of a lower bunk that was just across the aisle from where I was laying in an upper one, and I saw the sharp look of his gray eyes clearly as a match blazed in his cupped hands. Then the fire of a cigarette end glowed, and the sergeant's face

showed dimly in the light that flickered from the sputtering poker-game candles. It was dark up where I was, and I turned over on my stomach and looked down. A regular crowd of the non-coms was jamming the bunks around the sergeant as he begun to tell about Houel, Junie Tadousac, Johnny Hard, Black Jean, and Captain Dill. But I stayed where I was, laid quiet, and listened.

"The old hell begin to pop, gang, not a week after you pulled out. But it had been blazin' under cover for a good while. Yes, sir, gang, there was more hell-fire around that little old town of Houel than we'd ever dreamed of. Man, the Frogs was wild. The way they'd performed about the armistice was nothin'.

"How come? Well, about a week after you birds left the Houel Frogs learned the facts of the general court that had give their particular hero six years at hard labor. You remember that Sergeant Buson, the cousin of Fabienne, who tried to mop up on a whole dozen of us last summer? Well, that bird had come through three wounds and four years at the front. He'd won his sergeant's stripes and three citations, and he was the pride of the whole damn Frog town. And then what happened to him, well, it was enough to set 'em wild, I'll tell the cockeyed world.

"Gimme a match, somebody. I'll tell you, gang, you yell your heads off about our old army, and she's bad enough, I admit, with all the crap we've had to take from these high-school punks of war-baby officers; and we can grind our teeth and rave about the savage Boche; but if you want a look at the genuine hard stuff, if you want to see a man soldierin' with a firin' squad's rifles pointin' at his heart, a man made to walk a straight and narrow track between stone rules that has spikes stickin' from 'em on both sides, take a look at the pore damn soldier of a

Frog. I can sling their gab—and the tales I've heard—man, I know! The 40th Marines, who got the name of bein' such beastly devils in Paris, birds like Hard-Boiled Smith, and the like in our army, they're nothin'!

"Look out, Novak, there's a candle tipped over. Yeah, I'll get on with the story. Keep your ears open, you big skull-cracker.

"Well, the way she started was Black Jean's—the Frogs' name for him—regiment come out of the lines a month before the armistice pretty much shot to pieces and was to be in a rest area for ten days or so, fillin' up with replacements and gettin' itself reorganized.

"They was a private in the outfit, one of these old-like birds, savvy voo, who had a wife and kids back in some little Touraine burg—one of these wrinkle-faced runts with draggly mustaches that we see so much of—and he had somehow managed to pull through the whole war without any more than a scratch or two. He was a meek soul, it seemed like, and the supply sergeant—one of these young, plump, red-faced, struttin' sort of Frogs you see so much of, too—he took a delight in bullyin' this meek old baby. The pore old private needed a pair of britches when he got back to the rest area, for a squirt of shrapnel had ripped his into tatters behind, without, however, bitin' the hide. The behind of the old bird's britches, all badly patched up, seemed to tickle this young bully of a supply sergeant, and he wouldn't issue a new pair. Or else he was just nacher'ly mean.

"Gimme another hump, somebody. Thanks, Sumovski. Well, the pore old private went to the young bully sergeant regular, day after day, askin' for a new pair of britches, seel voo play. But all he got was rough jokes about ragged-behind britches bein' good enough for a

wrinkled old runt like himself. So it went for about a week, the supply sergeant havin' the time of his life with the pore old Frog, who was still as polite and persistent as ever. Then, finally, to cap his wonderful joke, the supply sergeant issued him a pair of britches that had been took from a dead soldier, and which was simply caked with blood.

"That really roiled the old bird at last. And he got on his ear so that he bawled and crabbed his head off at the supply sergeant; and then this baby forgets his joke, gets on his own ear, and reports the old bird as insubordinate to the platoon commander. This lieutenant was one of the kind of officers that has made the Frog people rise up every so often in their history and go to killin' everybody over them. He ordered the old private to wear the britches as they were, a punishment for his insubordinatin' talk to the supply sergeant.

"Well, the old boy bucked on it, the lieutenant put him under arrest on a charge of mutiny, and the case was took to the colonel of the regiment. This colonel was of the same breed as the lieutenant, only older, and that much the worse, for his age. You've seen the Frog field and general officers with the vin roosh cheeks, the black mustaches that stick up like wires around their beaks of noses, the eyes just little coaly black marbles under shaggy eyebrows, and how you think of them as a snake when you look at them and hate them like a snake. That was the colonel's breed.

"Here's where Black Jean comes in. Accordin' to Fabienne, the big black sergeant had knowed what breed the lieutenant and the colonel was, and he had talked about them a plenty last summer. So he had an idea of what he was goin' up against when he and another sergeant of

the old private's company went to the colonel and requested him to turn the victim loose and dismiss the rotten charges.

"Black Jean and the other sergeant were put under arrest themselves; that was the colonel's answer. His first answer, I mean. For he went to raisin' heaven and hell to get all three convicted of mutiny under fire, though the outfit was back in a rest area when it all happened. You see, this hard-boiled bum had wasted a lot of lives in the last attack he'd ordered, he knowed the whole regiment was hostile at him anyhow, so all he could think of was to put the fear of God into 'em, like such cold-blooded birds who are nuts with a little authority always do.

"He called up another sergeant, one who had been a judge in civilian life, and ordered him to dig up enough law to allow him to stick all three against a wall and have them shot. This sergeant was a pretty good egg, it seems, and he argued his head off to make the colonel see that Black Jean and the other sergeant couldn't be shot just for makin' the request they did. The colonel listened to him, but he was bound to take the law into his own hands as far as he could, anyhow.

"He judged the general court himself and wouldn't allow anybody to testify but the supply sergeant and the lieutenant. In five minutes he was ready to give his judgment.

"The pore old private was sentenced to be shot, and Black Jean and the other sergeant were sentenced to six years at hard labor. Accordin' to the Frog story, the old wrinkled runt of a private died game, callin' out the names of his wife and kids as the bullets brought him down. And

by the time the Armistice was signed, Black Jean and the other game guy had begun to serve their sentences.

"Throw another stick of wood in that stove, somebody. Jeezus, but this is a chilly country, even if she does only rain and never snows. Yeah, yeah; hang on to yourself, you big skull-cracker; I'm tellin' this. Light another candle there; the old one's burnin' down to the bunk.

"Say, gang, you who was there the night of the coney party in Madam Buson's back room know the guts of Black Jean. God, I can still see him, backed into a corner, his chunky legs braced, his barrel chest heavin' under his military medal and croy de gear with palms, his laugh ringin' out, but his eyes blazin' with the old fightin' hell-fire as he spun the Luger in the air, caught 'er with a neat twist of his hairy hand, and asked us all to come on and play! Yeah, I can still see that big black Frog, and I can imagine him meekly and humbly servin' away six years at hard labor for a deal like that! Yes, I can—*not!*

"He come home, all right. Come in an American uniform which he'd stole from a salvage dump, come with his mustache shaved and lookin' a man right in the dough-boy's fightin'-clothes. He come at night to the Buson's, when I was there—when I was there with Fabienne, and over with Junie Tadousac was Johnny Hard.

"Yeah, it was all right with old lady Tadousac when Johnny Hard weakened, started ramblin' over from Saguenay, and promised to marry Junie and take her back to old Chi.

"That's what she'd been after—Junie, I mean. That was what every Frog madam around knowed. She'd never wanted to marry Black Jean in the first place, I guess; but she give up and fell for him when he come home in '17,

with a sergeant's stripes on his sleeve and medals on his chest. Junie was nacher'ly a wild kid, crazy for Paris ever since she was knee-high, the old madams said, and she knowed she had the looks and shape to get by anywhere. But did she ever give a damn about Johnny Hard? Hell, no. She was for nobody but Junie Tadousac, you bet. Here was an officeyay, and she saw in him the chance to get away from the little Frog town and out to the grand places of the world she'd dreamed about. These small-town beauties are the same the world over. Live in Houel till she was wrinkled and gray, housekeepin' for Black Jean and havin' his babies, while he run his old sawmill—pff! non! non! Not when she could snare an American lieutenant.

"After the armistice she played Johnny Hard off the boards. Nobody could figger why he'd kept layin' off her, for it was plain that he'd been strong for this warm-eyed madamozel with the curly, yellow hair right along. Well, the reason was, he and Black Jean scrapped over her last summer. Johnny Hard cleaned the Frog sergeant, but he promised to lay off the beautiful madamozel, anyhow. And he did while he was soldierin' his head off. The major had promised him a shot at the front, and the lieutenant was hopin' to Chris' he'd go up quick. Then everything would be settled.

"But here the famous author, Pickle Dill, comes into the picture. I've never quite figgered that bird out; but I guess when Johnny Hard first went to ridin' him in his playful rough way, at Camp Mills the Pickle did more than just get on his ear; he caught one of these grudges which only the guys that call themselves God's own good men can get. Here he was, a great author knowed all over the country. Ace high with the regimental commander.

But Johnny Hard, he gives a damn! Prob'ly never read a book in his life. All he knows is bossin' iron workers, playin' politics for Hinky Dink, and soldierin'. And he treats Dill as just a war baby, and a particularly rotten one at that.

"He keeps ridin' Dill, and finally this baby starts to lay for him. And sees his grand chance when he is made the stool officer of the regiment. Hears from the Frogs about Johnny Hard's battle with Black Jean. And then—you remember that Kansas corporal who was busted for sockin' Funke with a bottle—well, this baby had seen the battle, and Dill knows it. So he makes the pore Hoosier a corporal to keep him with the outfit. Dill wants to get a sure cinch on Johnny Hard, and have him busted, but stay under cover himself.

"He's yellow, see, and all he does is strut around like a little tin Napoleon and slip stuff under cover to the colonel. If he comes out in the open, he's scared Johnny Hard'll get him after the war. He wants to do the dirty work through somebody else, see. When he's appointed stool officer of the regiment he makes this pore Kansas bird a stool in the company. Hopes to play him for a sucker and work him into puttin' the stuff over with the colonel. But Dill ain't got the nerve, or he don't use his head; anyway, everything just drifts along.

"But he does get enough to the colonel by the way of no harm so that Johnny Hard is knocked out of his chance at the front, and then he is passed over in the promotions. I got the right dope. Never mind how I got it. Maybe Novak'll tell you. Anyhow, after the armistice, and for a while before, too, Johnny Hard was lettin' everything go to hell. A quart of cognac a day. And soon it was back to Junie of the white neck and yellow curls.

"Remember that stormy old Christmas night? Well, Junie played sick, and Madam Tadousac fell for it and went to the midnight mass alone. And when she was gone, Johnny Hard beat it through the orderly room and over to the house. But somebody had been spyin' on him and rambled down to the church to tip the madam off. Know who it was? Captain Frank Lindon Dill, author of the famous Western moral novel *Wyoming Lad*, ex-stool-officer of the regiment, now the adjutant, that great man! Nobody else. Yeah, I'm tellin' you straight. Still never had the guts to come out and make charges against Johnny Hard on his own hook.

"But the madam doesn't quite catch 'em, and Johnny Hard got away. Junie and her ma had a royal battle, and the old lady went to the colonel with her story. Dill had made her promise to keep his name out of it, when he found that Junie was goin' to deny everything. So all that happened to Johnny Hard was to be transferred to division headquarters and stuck in a company guardin' Boche prisoners. For the good of the service, you know. It seemed to have knocked the old boy hay-wire; anyhow, he didn't have the guts to keep away from his yellow-headed flame.

"And here he was this night, over from Saguenay and at the Tadousacs, makin' love to Junie when Black Jean slipped into the Buson's kitchen.

"I was there, as I said, kiddin' along with Fabienne. The old folks was there, too; but they wasn't payin' us any mind, and we wasn't payin' them any, neither. All of a sudden the door opened and Black Jean, in the doughboy's uniform, plunged inside and slammed the door hard behind him. We was all about petrified for a minute, and could only gape at him. He was lean and hard,

and, with a black stubble on them, his set jaws looked like iron. They was nothin' of his old laughin' wildness about him, but the way his eyes smouldered showed he hadn't lost his old fire. Man, when they begun to glare at me I could see sudden death!

"Gimme a match. Jeezus, I can't keep this pill a goin'. Well, in another second they were all huggin' and cryin' over him; and in a little bit Fabienne had convinced him I was all right, and he settled down to some cognac and coffee, bread and cheese, which he simply wolfed down; and then he told his story, just as I've told you.

"He wanted money, he wanted to say goodbye to Junie, and then he was goin' to beat it for the coast and try to get away until that rotten court-martial sentence was turned over. He swore by all kinds of thunder, lightning, and saints that he'd croak before he'd do another day of that damned sentence. Some man, that black sergeant, I'll tell the cockeyed world!

"When he started over to see Junie, nobody tried to keep him from goin', as we didn't know Johnny Hard was over there; but we did suspect there'd be more or less hell to pay, for we knowed how Junie'd quit him. So I followed him out, slid over the wall a little bit after he did, slipped across the yard, and waited at the door for whatever might happen.

"I didn't wait long. A scream from Madam Tadousac rung out, and before I hardly knowed what I was doin', I'd opened the door and was starin' inside.

"A rousin' blaze in the fireplace throwed a dancin' red glow all over the kitchen. Back in a corner, his right hand bracin' himself against one wall, his left fingers spread on the other one, his head bowed under where a copper kettle was hangin', a dark smear on his chin and

a red trickle droppin' from it, stood Johnny Hard. Three feet away from him Black Jean was crouched, his head stuck out like a bull's, his fists up, and he was growlin' out all the cochons, chiens, shamoos, crapos, and so on that he could lay his tongue to, and was beggin' Johnny Hard to come out and fight. Over by the fireplace bench was Junie, standin' with her hands on her hips, the light of the fireplace makin' a kind of red mist around her yellow curls, and a don't-give-a-damn-what-happens smile on her impudent pretty face. On the stairway was Madam Tadousac, in her nightdress, gaspin' to get breath for another scream.

"I saw hell had begun to pop then sure enough, and I made ready to dive for the Frog's legs, if he started another swing at Johnny Hard. And I can tell you, gang, I felt about nuts to see the old boy huddled there, and so hard he used to be, but now he only wiped the blood from his chin, looked at Black Jean's feet, and groaned, 'Jeezus damn me! Oh, for Chri' sake!'

" 'Sacree!' sighed Black Jean, stoppin' that quick his ragin' talk. Then he stared at Johnny Hard until a look of pity come to his eyes, seein' the lieutenant as big and powerful as ever, but gone to hell so's he simply wasn't Johnny Hard any more at all. Seein' it now, Black Jean half whispered, 'Lieutenant! Voo zait—ah, how you look! Damn! Where is zat soldat you was wan time? Eh! Eh! Madamozel—vala!' He gripped Junie by the arm, pointed his big finger at Johnny Hard, and went to talkin' in Frog: 'See, Junie! That was a man, that. We fought like a million devils for you. I lost, but he give me the prize. I left him a brother in arms. But you have made him—so! Behold!'

"But Junie only smiled, pouted her mouth, and looked into the fire. Black Jean made a step back from her. His

hand swung around. Then she staggered from a stinging slap on the mouth. Black Jean laughed, but his stubbly jaws was lookin' like iron again.

"'Ha, I could kill you,' he said, laughin' still. 'I could go back to the military prison with the heart like a broken shell. That would make you proud, no? Don't fool yourself, Madamozel. Liberty Black Jean still loves. He is still a man. He escapes or he dies. His last thought will never be of Junie Tadousac now. Ah, no! Adieu, little spider!'

"He turned to go out. I turned to leave first. Junie, still smilin' through the splotchy flush around her mouth, only shook her curls in the red, flickerin' shadows of the fire. Madam Tadousac, still standin' on the stairway, thanked God. But Black Jean was not finished with Johnny Hard. The old boy had begin to come back to himself a ways.

"'Chris', I was goin' to marry her!' he yelled, suddenly stridin' out and throwin' Black Jean around with a jerk at his arm.

"'Alor,' said Black Jean, his voice showin' about as much feelin' as a rock droppin' on a rock. 'Ze American way, non?'

"'Forget the Go'damn wise cracks!' Johnny Hard's voice rose up to his old commandin' tones. 'I ain't tryin' to clean myself on her skirts one way or another, see! She gets a guy—she'd get anybody, and get 'im hard——'

"'So I 'ave know',' said Black Jean politely.

"'Listen! What I mean is, I knowed it was me or somebody else, see. I told myself I was playin' her on your account, see. Then, Jeezus damn me, it all went haywire—all to the bad, savvy voo—me, I mean. Then you was sloughed for mutiny. You was, damn it! Ain't you an escaped prisoner now? What I promised you—wasn't that soldier to soldier, huh? I was playin' no game for a

mutineer. You got me here by surprise. Hell, I could turn you in——'

"'No, lieutenant,' said Black Jean very softly. 'You won'—turn me in.'

"'No, but I'm givin' you something straight. Boy, who the hell do you think you are?' Johnny Hard was goin' good, but his voice didn't have quite her old fire. He wasn't quite sure of himself, and he sounded more bluster than I like to hear. 'Yeah, who do you think you are? Still a soldier, a sergeant with medals, huh? Not so anybody could notice it. A bird escaped from doin' time for mutiny. That's you, old timer!'

"'A toad. A dog of a convict,' said Junie in French, takin' the lieutenant's arm.

"Well, gang, I saw it was time for old Shevvie to horn in. Black Jean was lookin' wild again, and I knowed that by now Johnny Hard had talked himself into thinkin' he was right, and he was ready to battle. So I stepped up and told the story Black Jean had given us at the Busons.

"When I was through, Johnny Hard got as desperate a look as I ever saw on a man's face; but he stepped away from Junie, and growled out in a shaky hoarse voice, 'All right. That's enough. I'm with you now till hell freezes over. I've five hundred francs on my hip. Jean, she's all yours. Let's beat it to your uncle's and plan your getaway.'

"The two swung out with never a look back, but I had to have a last glimpse of Junie. I was curious to know if she was still wearin' her smile. She was, and all her beauty, too, gang, I'll tell the world. Leanin' against the fireplace bench, her head tossed back against the hands clasped behind it, the red firelight playin' over her white arms, yellow curls, and red mouth like it loved them all.

And there was her scornful smile. But there was a hard glitter in her eyes, instead of them seemin' swimmy and warm. Just the look that you get often enough from beautiful, stony-hearted Janes like her, the look which says, 'Ain't men the damn fools, though?'

"I wanted to tell her a few, but I shut down on myself and started out. And it was just an accident I happened to notice Madam Tadousac was not on the stairs any more. I stared at Junie, but she never changed a trace of that cold smile of hers. And she said, 'Mamma is gone to bed.'

"Now I ain't exactly a damn fool altogether, and I got a strong hunch right now that Junie was speakin' a nice li'l lie, and not a white one, neither. And I played my hunch right now. I was out like a shot, and spoke three words to Johnny Hard, and we looked. Sure enough, the gate was open.

"Down the street we hauled legs as swift as we could go; and we got to Captain Dill's billet just in time to catch Madam Tadousac comin' out and to see the Pickle dodge back in. He was sendin' her to the gendarms and he was goin' to the m. p.'s.

" 'Get this old gal back home and put the fear of God in her, Shevvie,' snapped Johnny Hard to me. 'And here——' He shoved a roll of francs into my hand '—slip this to Jean and tell him where to write me in Chi. As for me, I'm goin' to bust in on this bird and give him his needin's right. And let him know that if I get sloughed, I've a gang in Chi that'll get him.'

"Well, the line I handed old lady Tadousac was a crime. I'm damn near ashamed of it now. Anyway, I throwed a scare into her that shut her trap for keeps.

" 'I go,' was Black Jean's last word. 'Tell the lieutenant

I write from Mexico. Perhaps he come to me. Brothers in arms, we make the fine war. Hom! That magnificent soldier! That grand man! Alor, adieu, my sergeant. Bon chance!’

“Well, if you want to see how Johnny Hard give his needin’s to the regimental adjutant, take a look in the officers’ quarters tomorrow and pipe down the Pickle. He said he fell off the canal bridge, and Miss Pilsner-Orting was so sorry for him they got engaged. But that night when he went back to Saguenay, Johnny Hard had damn little hide left on his fists, I’ll tell the cockeyed world!

“There was no word come from Black Jean, and no news about him. Looks like he made ’er through to the coast and away for Mexico. But if he thinks Johnny Hard’ll join him there—oh, hell—yeah, he’ll join Black Jean—if Junie Tadousac ditches him in time, after she sees what she can do for herself in the good old U. S. A.

“Yeah, Johnny Hard was back in a couple of nights. Wanted to make sure I’d handled the old lady right, he said. Yeah, that was it. Sure. That gal with her curves like a pretzel, her white arms and neck, warm eyes, yellow curls, and stony heart had nothin’ to do with him comin’ back at all! Jeezus, no! And he was comin’ over about every other night at the time we pulled out. He’ll hook up with her as sure as God made sour apples. She’s got him foul.

“Gimme another pill, somebody. Fine. Ain’t nobody a drink? No? Well, let me take a hand in the game. Start ’er goin’ again. Where’s some more candles? What’s the ante? Say, I had another letter from that old Montana bird, Missoula Red. Remember the guy in my platoon who was about fifty, and dyed his hair to be drafted?

Wants me to come out to Montana and ranch with him. Maybe I will. Damn country's gone dry, and what's a pore bartender to do with all his fine talents? My deal, you say? All right. Let's go."

I laid back in the blankets for a while and listened to the non-coms talk over the poker game about what a fine company-commander Johnny Hard used to be, how it was the nuts that an officer like him never got to go to the front and for war babies to be made captains over him; how the women were all the nuts except the ones who would be true to one guy and settle down and make a good wife for him; how it had been a rotten war and was sure the nuts on account of the war-baby officers of high-school punks, the m. p.'s, the court martials, the Y. M. C. A., the Limeys and the Frogs; how it was the nuts to have to rot in a mudhole like the Brest camp, waiting to go home; and how it was the nuts the way the cards were running tonight——

"Raise you a franc." "Call 'er." "Yeah, Johnny Hard was the only officer in the whole damn regiment." "Everybody makes a fool of himself about women some time or another." "Boy, you tell 'em, but over here in the army is a hell of a place to do it." "You're waitin' till you get home, hey Horse?" "I'll say." "Don't forget that good old American custom, the shotgun weddin', Horse, me lad." "Never you mind." "Deal the cards." "What you drawin'?" "No rabbit-huntin'; keep your mitts off the deck." "All I need is cooties to make life one continual round of pleasure in this hole." "I'll go to jail before they hook me in another war." "Me, too. Hope to spit in your mess kit—'less it's against the Frogs." "Bet a franc—yeah—Johnny Hard—flossy Jane—hope the black Frog makes 'er—got a pill, somebody—raise you a franc——"

I laid and listened to it until I began to get drowsy and the words only made a humming sound as they rose to my ears. I agreed about everything being so rotten and the nuts, and I'd like to have joined the crabbing on account of my own troubles. But I knew I wasn't wanted; for nobody didn't even have the wrong idea about me any more; I was just about forgotten, and I didn't care.

Pretty soon I had my clothes off and was going to sleep. I felt sorry for Black Jean and Johnny Hard, as I thought for a little bit about Sergeant Shevlin's story. Then I went to thinking that I really would have to get rid of my greasy britches, and comb, shave, and clean up a little and have my hair cut tomorrow morning—in the afternoon, anyway. Maybe the embarkation orders would come. And then it wouldn't be long until I was free to go home, or to any other place I felt like. Somehow I would feel rotten when I thought of going home to my good old folks. It was like the non-coms said in their crabbing; a lot of things had got rotten for nearly everybody in the war; and about everything imaginable had got rotten for me. It seemed like the war had used up everything I had when I come into the army; and all that I had left was simply rotten, and that was all there was to it. And it smeared over even my pleasantest thoughts—of the old folks—that kid of a Lola Bandon in Kansas City—Joe Beedy, who still thought I was a pretty good old kid—and all.

The crabbing was still going on over the poker game when I went to sleep.

XVIII

IN THE PIT



YOU men keep close to your barracks to-day. We're apt to get embarkation orders any time. Got it? All right. Right by squads—forward—*ho!*"

Company F marched out over the wide sidewalk, on the way to morning mess.

It was the fifty-fifth time that we had fell in and marched at attention to the Marines' mess hall. I had kept count of every meal. And every morning it had been the same old orders to keep close to our barracks, as the embarkation orders might come any time. But this would probably be just another dismal old day of waiting, waiting, waiting. It seemed like we would never get embarked on a transport and started for home.

This was a regular Brest morning. The slaty gray clouds appeared to have been jammed together and bulged down into wooly rolls and wrinkles from which rags dragged away. It misted and drizzled, but never rained. There was wet enough, though, to soon make our slickers damp, and the drizzle oozed in around our necks and sopped our faces and hair. The weather was as chilly as a frost fog and as soaking as a real rain. The roofs of the barracks dribbled. There was little puddles among the gravel of the camp streets which the trucks would keep grinding down into the sloppy mud as fast as it was spread on. Chilly trickles run over our hands. Water was squashed in bubbles from the soggy boards of the side-

walk at every step. Water and mud! Water and mud! Clouds, drizzle, and mist! It was enough to ruin a body's appetite.

Still, I managed to feel pretty hungry when the Marine k. p.'s had filled my mess kit with corn-meal mush and Karo, and the lid with bacon and bread, and the canteen cup with coffee. From all the stories the casuals told, the Marines did some good fighting at the front, what there was of them; but all I knowed of them personally was in the mess halls they run at the Brest camp. I certainly had to admire the way the Marines could cook and k. p. It was the only bright spot of waiting and waiting in that miserable misty, muddy, cloudy Brest country.

About a thousand soldiers were at the tables in the big mess hall, all standing, and all eating as fast as they could, though there was nothing to do but lay around after mess was over. I crowded myself into a vacant place and went to eating my mush and Karo as fast as any of them. A few hearty swallows of that combination and a heavy drink of coffee, and I begun to feel warm and comfortable inside. And I forgot my troubles, like I usually did when I was eating.

I forgot them until I heard a voice that sounded familiar from across the table, and I looked up to see who it was. The mess hall was half dark and faces couldn't be seen very plain, but I recognized Sergeant Shevlin. He was finishing his coffee and talking into First Sergeant Novak's ear.

"How do you feel about 'er, Novak, now that it's fini la gear for good? Used to yearn for 'er a lot, huh? What you think you'll do with yourself when you get that red chevron on your sleeve? How'll you perform when you ain't got anybody to ride and step on their tail?"

"Don't fret yourself about me, Shevvie," growled the first sergeant. "It's me for hard labor, toot sweet. Skull-crackin' is payin' its twenty-five bucks a day. The way I'll forget this man's cockeyed war it'd make your head swim."

"Yeah. That's what we all say. Well, you ought to get by, if anybody. Me, I dunno. What do you know about the damn country goin' dry? The Statue of Liberty is carryin' a umbrella and wearin' smoke glasses. Yeah, I got to learn a new trade. I might ramble to Montana, sure enough. What do you know about that old bull-shooter of a Missoula Red? He says he's got three thousand acres of ranch, a thousand bald-faced steers and cows, and five handsome red-headed daughters. And he invites me out. Looks like I'm settin' on the world, anyhow."

"Boy, bull-shooter is right. Would you believe anything that old stiff told you?"

"I don't believe anybody no more. Not even my own grandmother. But I give a damn about the red-headed daughters. I have a hunch I'll soon get a bellyful of Chi gone dry. I'll go nuts and take to the sticks."

"You keep to old Chi, Shevvie. Hell, go into politics. You'd go good, I'd say."

"Fat chance. Far as I can figger, Illinois'll have a hundred and eighty-seven colonels all nuts to go the way of pore old Teddy Roosevelt. Fat chance a lousy sergeant would have against that mob of colonels, even runnin' for dog-catcher."

"Get in with one of the colonels, then, Shevvie. How about Colonel Nome? Won't he run for mayor of Chi or something like?"

"Sure. Him and all the rest'll run hog-wild till they are roped and tied down. They've had a good taste of

authority, and, boy, it'll be hard to change their appetites."

"Well, hop to 'er with the rest. Me, all I know is skull-crackin' and soldierin'; but you, Shevvie, you got a pull. Didn't you use to play politics with Johnny Hard and his gang? Hop to 'er again. Stick to old Chi, Shevvie, and we'll have some grand times together."

"Aw, hell, Novak, you'll get back with the Hunyoks again and forget I ever lived. And as for Johnny Hard—Jeezus, the old burg'll be shot to hell right. No, I'm gone. Me for the sticks."

"Well, we ain't out of the Frog country yet. Wait'll you hear the roar of the Loop and get a whiff of old Clark Street again. Snap into 'er, Shevvie. You'll be Jake."

"Yeah, you can be rearin' to go, with your twenty-five-bucks-a-day job ahead. But me—hell, chop the old guff, and let's haul feet out of here."

They had looked at me three or four times while they were talking, but they never paid me any mind. And they didn't now, as they gathered up their mess tools and crowded out between the rows of soldiers still standing and eating at the tables. I didn't care, for I was used to it, but I would have liked to say something to Sergeant Shevlin to cheer him up, for he had always stuck up for me just as he had promised and I liked him about as well as anybody else in the company. But he was letting me alone now, like everybody else, and I couldn't feel sorry. Being let alone was about all I asked for, except to get back to the States and out of the army.

Of course these last months had been everlastingly lonesome and dull, but that was because it seemed like the only way I could get along was to keep in a hole by myself, eat and sleep, and drink cognac whenever I had

the francs to buy it. So all I asked for was to be let alone. When I was discharged, I figured, everything would be different. I'd be among people then who understood me, or at least they wouldn't have a lot of wrong ideas in their heads about the things I'd done. And then I could be my old, sociable, jolly self again. I certainly didn't look forward to a pile of misery when I was out of the army, like Sergeant Shevlin seemed to. I knowed I would be ambitious, more like the first sergeant, and expecting nothing but fine times. I certainly expected a great change of some kind. Living along these last months like I was the dirt under everybody's feet, my army ambitions had all fell away, and I couldn't even keep the spirit to look after myself like I should. But I knowed everything would turn entirely different the minute I was discharged from the army.

I was never surer of anything in my life as I finished the bacon, sopped up the last drop of Karo with a crust of bread, and swallowed the last drop of coffee. I always felt the most hopeful at such a time, and I was particularly so this morning, as I thought that even a man like Sergeant Shevlin didn't see the future nearly so bright as I did.

I was almost whistling a tune, for the first time since I didn't know when, as I left the mess hall, where the talk of the soldiers was rolling up and down in one big murmuring sound that was almost music. I washed my mess kit and started back through the drizzle for the barracks.

Tramping down the soggy sidewalk, almost whistling a tune to myself, as my hopefulness drove away the sullen and bitter feelings that had been bowing me down for so long. Getting enough ambition back that I decided I would shave and clean myself up and get some new

britches, this afternoon, anyway, though I didn't really expect the embarkation orders to come. Not feeling miserable at all now because everybody was always letting me alone. Caring less than ever. It was what I wanted until I was discharged from the army. Then everything would be different.

Well, I might have knowed it, as I tramped along to the barracks, almost whistling, that somebody would start riding me before I was out of the army and make me feel more sullen, bitter, and hopeless than ever. Somebody was bound to break loose and make me miserable with their wrong ideas about me again. I was certain to be put upon and abused, but I couldn't know it, for I was yet stumbling through the darkness to the times of my greatest trials. I was deep in the darkness of the pit I had digged for myself, and this darkness yet blinded my soul. I could not know of the trials ahead from which I should be hurled on to perdition, or else made to struggle back to the Light. The time had not come.

Tramping across the street, my hobnails scrunching in the wet gravel. Moseying on to my barracks, still feeling hopeful and good, never dreaming that before this day was over that terror of a skull-cracker first sergeant would tramp me down so low I would get the feeling that even my own home folks would treat me no better than dirt if I was to go home to them again; jumping on me so savagely and contemptibly before everybody in the company that I was never in the world to get over the torment of sullen and bitter thoughts in remembering it. After I had been left alone so long, to do it! And in front of everybody, so that they went to noticing me again, and they would laugh and sneer as they repeated his remarks to my face. And how he snapped and snarled the remarks,

like the vicious, contemptible brute of a skull-cracker foreigner he was! Right when all I was asking was to be let alone. I was still stumbling in the darkness, so I just bowed down miserably and took it all. There was no light yet. And there wasn't to be until I had passed through trials more terrible still, until I raised my eyes in misery and despair from the pit I had digged.

If I could have looked ahead this dismal, drizzly morning as I tramped along, feeling the hopefulest I had for weeks, almost whistling—if I could have seen the trials that was to come, I'd certainly have yielded everything as lost right there and then, and walked over to the bluff and thrown myself into the bay.

If I could have looked ahead and seen myself on that afternoon of early April when, with a red chevron on my left sleeve, I was into Chicago from Camp Grant; wondering why everything didn't look as bright and clear as I'd expected, for I was discharged and free and full of a fine restaurant dinner and some drinks of fiery whisky; trying to forget the grief the first sergeant's contemptible remarks had brought on me; laying my low feelings about the future on to a dismal lonesomeness that wouldn't go away; making up my mind after a few more drinks to go out to the soldiers' hospital, whether or no, and see Joe Beedy and learn how everything was——

Coming out on a great porch with vines growing over one end, the young green leaves still looking damp from a morning shower. The sky a sunny blue over a row of maple trees, but spotted with little fleecy clouds. The air fresh and keen with the smell of the morning shower.

Rows and gangs of wounded soldiers in wheel chairs all along the porch. One here with a puffy face the color of wrapping paper, his hair in rusty strings, his eyes dull,

his lips blue. Another, a regular kid with a droopy mouth like a girl's, his face bony thin, but with splotches of pink on the cheek bones, and his eyes black and bright. Another with so many bandages around his right leg that it looked like a sack of flour. Another with his head bandaged so that only one eye showed through the white strips. A bunch of soldiers who were not hurt so bad, arguing about which had been the fightingest division on the front. On beyond them a soldier by himself, a blanket over his legs, his chin tucked into an unhooked blouse collar, a campaign hat down over his eyes—Joe Beedy—poor old Joe—the only real friend I'd ever had——

"Well, here you are, Joe, old kid. Bon joor."

Joe's mournful eyes, looking bigger than ever now in his thin, drawn face, staring up at me, then his eyebrows coming down in a frown, and his voice drawling weakly, "Yeah, here I am. You got a nerve, 'old-kiddin' me, I'll say."

Me pulling back my hand like something had burned it, and my heart sinking down, sinking down. So Sade had told him all about it then. Well, I knowed it for sure, anyway; that was something; and Joe didn't appear to be so raging mad.

"Yeah, Funke was out here a week ago. He give me the dope on you, right enough. Jeezus, what a war! Chris', what a world!"

Joe's weak voice cranky as an old grandma's, and me feeling flustered all over as I realized it wasn't Sade Joe was sore about at all, but the old miserable wrong ideas that contemptible Sergeant Funke had been telling him.

"Joe, you oughtn't to listened to him. He was lyin' be-

cause he was sore over me bustin' his jaw for him. It was over Odile, Joe. He was lyin'——"

"Yeah, tell it to Sweeney. Sumovski was out yesterday afternoon, and I heard it all over again. Yeah, you turned into a fine guy, didn't you? You've been pretty damn wise, ain't you, huh? Got through this man's war pretty slick, I'll tell the world. I'm hep to that battle with the engineers, too, old timer. The Portygee told me about it when we hit the front. But I'd of swore then you was Jake, and I took it as a flock of bull. Yeah, you're a wise guy, right enough. One wise fox from Kansas. Come on with another war. Be a stool and play safe."

"Joe, I swear to God I never figgered on that a minute. It was intelligence work as Captain Dill said, and the most noble and patriotic any soldier could do. But everybody just misunderstood and got sore at me and talked the wrong ideas about it. I can bring Sergeant Shevlin out, Joe, and he'll tell you he don't blame me a particle. Joe, you just listen——"

"Yeah, yeah, all right. I don't want to listen, for I don't give a damn. To hell with your old troubles. I don't want to hear 'em. Got enough of my own. That's me. Still the same old luck. One of old lady Trouble's chillen all the time, that's Joe Beedy."

Thinking maybe there was still a chance for me to be friends with Joe again, wanting, anyway, to hear how it was with him and Sade: "Joe, old kid, you're still wounded and sick. You'll come out of it and never feel so rotten any more. Maybe you'll get back to your folks in Kansas City, and maybe I'll be livin' there then with the girl I told you about, Joe, and if you'll forget these wrong ideas——"

"Yeah, I'll be in old K. C., settin' on a corner sellin' pencils. That's more like it."

"Joe, I always said you was too pessimistic. How about that girl—what was her name now?"

"Oh, yeah, that girl! Sure. She comes out to see me three times a week bringin' candy and flowers—and her old man! All she did was to marry a Salvation Army bird about the time I was headed for the front; and the two of them, they come out together and pray for me and give me about the most miserable pleasure I ever enjoyed. I s'pose I can look forward to that pleasure till I've had about five more operations on the old hiker, which is all it will stand, and then I'll be free of them kind of pleasures, thanks. Yeah, that girl treats me just like she was my mother. Jeezus, yes!"

Me just staring and marveling and hardly able to believe my ears. Sade Nixon married to somebody else! I couldn't figure—I couldn't figure it out, not to save my soul.

"Joe, old kid——"

"Aw, lay off! Jeezus, can't you leave a guy alone? Cut out that 'old-kiddin' stuff, I told you once. I'm offa you and everybody else. I got my own troubles, and all I ask is to be left in peace with 'em. I might of knowed before. Well, I know now what you are and what everybody else is. Lemme alone."

Poor old Joe tucking his chin back down in his collar, shutting his eyes, their lids and the skin below them looking like two purple bruises on his thin, pale face. And me dragging myself away, not smelling the keen fresh air any more, but just the medicine smells from the bandages of the wounded soldiers.

And that night me fool-drunk busting into a Salva-

tion Army street-meeting and trying to talk to a girl with a black, red-banded bonnet over her goldy-red hair; and a Salvation Army man trying to pull me away from her; and then a policeman hauling me along——

“Hold yer head up, buddy. Walk straight now, soldier, till old Mike finds ye a flop. Ah, ye big divil, and will I have to carry ye then?”

It was all to happen just that way, but a body never knows. Here I was, putting my mess tools under the head of my bunk, seeing some of the soldiers heating water on the stoves, and thinking I'd wait a while before I butted in to clean myself up, as somebody might say something, then crawling up into my blankets to rest a while, all in perfect innocence, feeling so hopeful I took out Lola Bandon's snapshots and letters and amused myself by looking them over.

I laid there and looked at the snapshots, which were pretty much cracked and smeared by now, but they still appeared beautiful to me. I went over the letters again, and what I could read between the lines made the future look mighty bright. I thought I was seeing all kinds of fine pictures ahead as they kept changing in a bright haze, but of course there wasn't anything real. Nothing could happen as I was dreaming it would, for I was stumbling in the darkness of the pit, and all that I could see was images of sin, shining to lead me on to perdition. My soul was yet blind.

As I lay there in the chilly, gloomy barracks, my soul was already so far down in the darkness that I could not see the faintest glimmer of the true Light. I could not hear a whisper of the warning and comforting Voice. I could not see one of the features of the Tempter to know them, as I used to before I digged myself a pit. I could

not know that the time I was thinking of so hopefully now was to be the time of my greatest trial, when the Voice of warning and comfort was to sound again, and the Light was to reach me, and the Old Nick was to make his final struggle for my soul, with perdition yawning at my feet.

Down and down I'd been going in these months of army life, ever digging myself a deeper pit. The Old Nick come to tempt me no more, for I lived as one of the lost, as one of his own.

Oh, it is easy to dig a pit for yourself, to go down and down, deeper and deeper into the darkness of sin; but when at last you find that if you go on, your soul will be plunged into a bottomless blackness and lost in the eternal fires of hell, oh, then you know how far you have come from the Light, and how the way back to it is stony and narrow and steep to climb!

I could not know it now, for my soul was sightless in sin, and my thoughts were only carnal, and it seemed that they would forever be. Wishing profanely for cognac. Dreaming about how I would soak myself in some kind of good strong liquor as soon as I was out of the army and simply forget everything for a while. Hoping to be friends with Joe Beedy, imagining he'd get his leg fixed somehow so he could get around all right, seeing ourselves sporting around wickedly together, having one hell of a good time. Seeing ourselves in Kansas City, where I would have Lola Bandon for my girl, and I dreamed that maybe she'd be more. Hardly letting my old folks come into the picture. Just having unseemly, wicked, carnal thoughts, images of sin, the work of Old Nick himself.

And in my blindness I was to keep them for many a day. My eyes wasn't to be opened by my miserable experience with the first sergeant, or with Joe Beedy, or not in

the late of that afternoon in a Kansas City hotel when I was to call up the apartments Lola Bandon had written from, and hear a hearty woman's voice answering the ring: "Hope Apartments."

"I want to speak with Miss Lola Bandon, if you please."

My neck burning and a grin spreading over my face as I said it.

"Lola Bandon, did you say? Why—she hasn't been here for two months. Say, are you a friend of hers?"

"Yes'm. I used to know her over in Kansas. I just got back from the war. Could you give me her address?"

"Dear, yes. But—ha! ha!—she's not Lola Bandon any more."

"She's not! Who in thunder is she?"

"Mrs. Emory Gibson, if you please!"

"She's *who*?"

"Ha-ha-ha! Oh, dear, you're the fourth man, I do declare, who's called up and said that, and in the very same way, too. Ha-ha-ha! And I have to tell 'em all the same thing. Lola was married to Mr. Emory Gibson not two months ago."

"She was?"

"Yes, sir; right here in my parlor. Well, it was an event. Mr. Gibson's a real swell, and a fine-lookin', well-preserved man, for all his forty years. He was her employer, and he has a good business, and he give her a fine home out on—just a minute—I'm so forgetful—I'll get the right address——"

Her hearty, laughing voice, which told me plain as anything she was one of these jolly, fat kind of gossiping women, fading away, and me hanging up, for I was suddenly feeling so disgusted that the address of Mrs. Emory Gibson was the last thing on earth I wanted to know, and

she herself the last person on earth I wanted to hear any more about.

Setting on the hotel bed then, with my elbows on my knees and my chin in my hands, and feeling like the worst fool alive as I looked at the creases in my finely pressed britches and at the flashy corporal's chevron which I had sewed back on my right sleeve and at the two new gold service-stripes on my left one. Feeling more like a disgusted fool than ever as I pulled out Lola's letters and looked them over and saw that I had been absolutely idiotic in reading between the lines; for now there was nothing between the lines at all, except the fact that she was mightily interested in the employer she was writing about so much. Thinking I could have expected it, for Ma certainly had been right, and the blood of the Swamp Creek Bandons was bound to tell, sooner or later. All Lola had was the trashy Bandon handsomeness. Thinking I ought to consider myself lucky to have had my eyes opened to her without any more trouble than it was, but still feeling as lonesome and downcast and blue as I ever had in my last, terrible, army days.

Dark coming on, and me still setting there on the bed, thinking and figuring. The world and everything seeming about as miserable and useless as it ever had seemed. A man and a woman laughing like everything in the next room, me getting sick of listening to them; going to the window then and seeing the folks below traipsing along under the street lights, many of them fellows in uniforms with girls; and here I was, all by myself, lonelier than I ever had been, and figuring it out that I had made a plain, idiotic fool of myself over Lola Bandon.

Disgusted, gloomy, and lonesome, plodding down the stairs, and the first sergeant's remarks when we had em-

barked in Brest coming back stronger than ever, and making me feel more sullen, bitter, and hopeless than ever, too. For it seemed like everybody was bound to go on thinking of me like that and treating me that way all the rest of my living days. But there was a half-drunk discharged soldier swaggering over from the clerk's desk, looking at me with a friendly grin, and saying, "'Lo, buddy. What's on your mind? Steppin' out for a little sport, huh? Same 'ere. Le's go 'er together. What say?'"

All that was ahead, and here I was, laying in my bunk through this rainy morning, reading over Lola Bandon's letters, gazing at her snapshots, still making a plain, idiotic fool out of myself about her. I laid there and drowsed and dreamed; and before I knowed it, noontime was about around, and it was too late to shave and clean up before mess. I was just vowing that I would do it first thing after mess, when First Sergeant Novak come stomping through the door.

"Yay, gang! Out for mess and make 'er snappy! And beat 'er back toot sweet, for we march at two! Bound for home! We're on our way! Three casual companies held back, and E, F, and G takes their place! Roll up and fall in soon as you get back from mess. Home, boys, home, it's home we ought to be—I'll tell the cockeyed world!"

First Sergeant Novak strode down the barracks aisle, yelling at everybody as he tramped along. Everybody who could reach him was slapping him on the back and yelling, "That's the old top!" as he passed.

It was the most crazy racketing and rushing you ever saw as we piled out for mess. If I'd had a lick of sense, I'd have stayed and shaved, anyway, and let the mess go to thunder. I did think about it, but I was feeling drowsy and sluggish, and I know I wouldn't have time to get

another uniform and a haircut now, anyway, so I just let myself be crowded along and into the excited ranks that was falling in for mess.

And after mess there was no time at all. The barracks was like a madhouse with the soldiers jamming back and forth to gather up their equipment, and rolling their packs in the barracks aisle. It was a flushed and sweaty mob of soldiers that bunched up in the gravel street, and there was more laughing, joshing, and yelling than I'd heard for months, as the first sergeant bawled for us to fall in. It was something like the old times in Company F, when everybody was rearing to go. After the strain of waiting so long in this sloppy, drizzly, chilly, gloomy camp of Brest, the orders to embark had come so sudden that they were a wonderful surprise. Everybody was joyful. I even felt so much that way myself that I nearly forgot my looks and got excited as I thought of how much closer now were the bright pictures I was seeing that morning. Wouldn't be long, now, till I was out of the old army, and then everything would be fine.

But I remembered my looks in time to fall into a rear rank.

Company F marched down the hill road. Every soldier was bent under his heavy pack, and every one skidded and stumbled along in the round sloppy gravel. The weather was still drizzly and cold. But the faces of the soldiers was flushed, and their eyes was shining.

At last we were halted on the dock. The embarkation officer called out names from a list, and the soldiers slowly filed on the ship. In about half an hour I was at the gang plank.

"You're a fine-looking specimen!" growled the embarkation officer. "Why didn't you get a shave and a haircut

and scrub some of that grease off your uniform, hey?" And then, without giving me a chance to explain how I'd been going to do it this very afternoon, only the orders to embark come so quick I didn't have time, he lit in on the first sergeant and the captain. "What's the idea of bringing one of your men here in such a condition? Have you had anything else to do here except keeping up your outfit? I've a damn good mind to shoot your company back to camp. Discipline's gone to hell. Well, damn it, pass on."

I'd never yet seen the first sergeant look so much like a savage, so much like the big bully of a skull-cracker foreigner that he was, and even Captain Traub was so stirred he simply glared at me. And I knowed then my army troubles wasn't over yet. All my joyful feelings died down, and the sickening, sullen, hopeless, bitter ones come back stronger than ever as I found my bunk and stowed my equipment away. And when we were ordered up on deck for the doctors to inspect us, I felt in my bones that something terrible was going to happen before I come back down again.

Well, it seemed at first like I'd got off mighty lucky, not to be put in the brig, or even getting extra duty; but when everybody heard that the embarkation officer had threatened to turn the company off the ship, even the New York Jews went to thinking it might have been more than a threat for discipline; and they all started to riding me and kept it up till I was discharged. They kept hammering it into me about what the first sergeant had said when he snapped and snarled at me for a good five minutes, until I could never hope to forget his miserable, contemptible bawling-out as long as I lived.

And I never had any peace about it until the eyes of

my soul was opened to the true Light; and then I could see that the memory was to be my cross, the burden that I was to carry up from the pit I had digged for myself with my army sins.

XIX

A CHRISTIAN AMERICAN CITIZEN



GREAT little joint, buddy, I'll tell the world. Come on and get acquainted. Forget this dame that throwed you down and married a slacker. Come on, Buddy, and forget your troubles. Boy, they're two rare madamozels, what I mean! And the old madam's got any kind of licker you want. Let's go."

And I did. I followed the soldier, though he was half drunk and was a swarthy, tough-looking customer with coarse, curly black hair, one of the kind of foreigners I had got so sick of thinking about. But I had been so infernally dismal lonesome I told him everything when we eat supper together. How I'd been misunderstood and lied about in my company before I was discharged. How my old bunkie had listened to a bunch of stuff which it was too much trouble to tell what it was, but which was all rotten lies, anyway. How I'd been deceived by a girl here in Kansas City who wrote to me all the time I was in France and who I'd just learned was married two months ago. And the soldier certainly was sympathetic.

I didn't care for his looks, but it seemed like I simply had to have somebody. The sullen and bitter feelings about the way everybody had done me kept swelling up in my throat till I felt I would choke and my eyes was getting wet. And I could see the savage, contemptible scowl on the first sergeant's face again. And I could hear his miserable remarks hammering in my ears, just as they

had been hammered into my ears again and again by the sneering and laughing non-coms and New York Jews on the trip across the ocean. I just wanted to perform until I could forget everything. It seemed like I was as low-down as I could ever be, and I wanted to lose every feeling about it. I wouldn't let myself think of my old folks. I shut them out of my mind and tried to shut everything else out by talking in a fever and bragging about everything I could think of to the half-drunk soldier as we turned from Main and climbed a dark side-street. Oh, I should have known that the time of my great trial was at hand; for I had descended so deep that to go on would mean perdition sure; and I was bound to have one more warning, one more chance, another hope. The Old Nick would have to make his final struggle for my soul.

"Say, that was nothin' the way I performed and made the madamozels come my way back in that little burg of Houel," I was saying. "Buddy, you ought to've been along when I made my attack in the Battle of Paris. You ought to seen the two I picked up on the Italians' boulevard and the time I had!" Never before had I sunk so low, to boast and brag of my carnal sins, forgetting all the shame my bringing-up had learned me. Never before had I shut my good old ma's teachings so far out of my mind. The Old Nick himself seemed to be using my tongue. "'Follow me, madamozels, for the time of your lives,' I told 'em. And, boy, they fell hard. Know where I took 'em? Boy, you'd never guess! Out to Versailles, where the palace of old Louis Fourteen and his fine gardens is. That was the place. Took 'em for a walk in the gardens first, one on each side of me, and I'll say they were some armfuls. Well, we walked around, and then I happened to notice that the window of the bedroom where Louis Fourteen

used to sleep was left open by somebody's carelessness—you know how his bed's still there, and everything. Well, I remembered what a great old bird he used to be for the women, and I got a wonderful idea. I shinned myself up a stone column and clumb through the window. There was a lot of silk tapestries hangin' around, and I made ropes out of 'em, let 'em down to the madamozels, and hauled 'em up. And there we was, and there was the bed that Louis Fourteen and I don't know how many other Frog kings had slept in, and with 'em I don't know how many beautiful, swell-shaped——”

“Go on, buddy. Some story. Don't give a damn if it's true or not. Let's hear the rest. You got me all excited.”

But I had stopped dead in my tracks. I was struck dumb on the spot, too, and all the wonderful feelings the Old Nick had put in me to make me think I'd been telling the story as well as Sergeant Shevlin had told it when he came back from his leave, and which had made me feel fine and forget all my troubles for the first time since I didn't know how long—the feelings all died down in one swallow of horrible shame. Boasting and bragging of carnal sins! I thought of it all of a sudden. I had never dared to do it before. And now I was stopped in my tracks and struck dumb by the powerful thought that the Old Nick not only had me, but he was now using me for his wicked ends and I was indeed a lost soul! I was sick with shame.

And what had done it was the sight of a little white church just across the street. Right in the middle of my boasting and bragging my eyes had turned towards it. It was like our church at home, like so many other folds all over our Christian land. Through the dark its wall, belfry, and steeple loomed up pure and white. There was colored light in all the tall stained windows, and that

light seemed to reach right across the street and enfold me. One of the windows was open at the top, and a powerful exhorting voice rolled through: "Oh, sisters—brothers! —ye lost sheep, oh, ye ungathered sheaves!—forward to the mourners' bench—your sins in the blood of the Lamb! Jesus saves! Jesus saves!"

"Let's beat it from that gospel-spoutin'. Snap 'er up, buddy. Let's go. Come on with the rest of that story."

The soldier's voice sounded far away. It come to me like an evil whisper, and I could feel it rasp on my nerves. For the sinful spirit of my bragging and boasting had died down that quick; and I was remembering again all the low-down misery I'd suffered; and again I was seeing the first sergeant's scowly face and hearing him say, "Mattock, I've always wondered why I let you live. But I know now. And I'll tell you straight. You——" But just then the words and music of a beautiful, good old revival hymn rose up in organ tones and the chorus of the congregation, rolled out and over me till I was drowned to everything else, and I begun to feel the first struggle of my awakening soul! Beautiful come the music and words of the good old hymn and my heart swelled and begun to pound as I listened:

"Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me——"

And then above the inspired singing the revivalist's voice rising powerfully in a feeling exhortation: "Jesus saves! Jesus saves! Oh, ye lost sheep, ye ungathered sheaves!" And now my awakened and struggling soul cried out from its darkness: "That's home, that's home callin' you, boy; the brightness in the windows over yonder is the light of home; the singin' and exhortin' is

the voice of home; and inside are worshipers like the old home folks you've never seen for so long. Boy, see and listen!"

But my flesh, steeped in sinful carnalities for so long, cried out, "What's the use of tormentin' yourself with that any more? You know you lost your religion long ago. You know your soul is lost. Follow this soldier here, for the good time. Up the hill there is women, liquor, and harmony. Go along and don't make a blamed fool of yourself, like you've done so many times before. You've let all holts go; just keep on lettin' 'em go; keep a slidin' and don't get into misery and torment again by strugglin' and strivin' to get away from sin, from the good times of life!"

"Just as I am——"

". . . ye ungathered sheaves! Oh, dear sister—oh, sister, kneel! Over you an angel hovers! And I see in the angel's hands your eternal crown. Glory to God! Jesus saves!"

"Well, for Chri' sake! You goin' to stand and gape at that gospel dump all night? What's eatin' you? Let's go!"

Oh, my poor abused, beaten-down soul, it is awakened! It looks up from its darkness, it cries out against having sunk down so far, it gathers its strength, its voice begins to implore, I feel its hands groping and I see its tears, and my own eyes are wet! And now I behold with awful horror and shame the pit that I have digged for myself; the hellish images of sin pass away, and I see only how lost I am in the darkness, and I know that the pit of eternal perdition itself, so bottomless and black, is yawning at my feet; but I look up with yearning and hope—and no Light comes! Oh, I have descended too far into the

darkness, I am lost, the old giant of despair grips me, I am helpless in his holt, and it is my doom to be kept down and finally hurled into the black and bottomless pit!

"Are you *ever* comin'? Damn if I'll wait another minute!"

"Yeah——"

Might as well. The old giant of despair had me foul. Might as well give up and let all holts go for good——

" . . . without one plea

But that Thy blood was shed for me!"

What was that inspired woman's voice, now singing higher and more exalted than all the others? Why, it was like Ma's, and it was singing the good old hymn high and exalted just exactly like Ma used to sing it! And I got a vision of her looking up so that the glow from the church lights was on her dear old face, making it as bright and good as an angel's; oh, how many a time had just that sight of my dear old lady at a revival made me strive and pray for the experience of religion that would promise me salvation eternal and bring earthly peace to Ma's heart!

"The Savior looks for His lost lambs! Come forward—the mercy seat——"

Was I actually lost? Was I gone too far in sin? If I went over there and joined the worshipers and converts, harkened to the exhortation, and prayed my hardest for the Light to come, would there be any use of it at all? Oh, if I could only get some of my old faith back, if I could only believe again—but I did, oh, I did believe!

For there was the Old Nick himself, in his true shape, standing in the darkness, his snaky, red arm beckoning from behind the soldier, his fiery face in its wickedest smile, his black eyes simply burning into mine! And I

heard the silkiest whisper of the Tempter's voice: "You are mine, body and soul. Body and soul, you are mine. Flee me and you'll know only misery in life. How will you forget—where but with me and in my gifts? I alone can teach you not to care. Flee me and you will be whipped by the scorn and sneers of these last times you have known." His silky whisper had sounded like a threat, like a command, but now the Old Nick begun a tempting plea. "Oh, follow me on, Parvin! Drink—painted girls—good times—oh, Parvin, the good times! Then you will forget. Up the hill, Parvin, up the hill to a dark door and a dark stair, but with shining times above. Flee me and the night will be torment, with misery for the morrow. The memory of the days when you were scorned and spat upon will never depart; you will bear it always unless you follow me. Come on, come on, oh, Parvin, don't be a fool—come on!"

"Well, I'm on my way. Stay here all night if you want to."

The soldier walking right through the Old Nick's red form, and me taking a step, and then a cry from my awakened soul: "Wait! Wait! Listen, boy! You already got some of your old faith back, or the Old Nick wouldn't be showin' himself again. Can't you see you're slippin' from his hands? Don't follow the soldier. Go over among your home kind of folks. Just try 'em. Just try and see if they don't make the Old Nick's talk sound like lies. Your own home kind of folks. They're the ones to make you forget your army troubles. Boy, listen to the sweet old song——"

"Oh, Lamb of God, I come—I come!"

"Boy, harken to the good old hymn. Listen to your

home kind of folks. They're the ones to make you forget the scorn and sneers of a pack of Romish and blasphemous, foreign, city soldiers. Why was their sneers and scorn, anyhow? Because you was brung up a Christian Kansas boy. Go over among your home kind of folks, and save your immortal soul!"

Running across the street, feeling the Old Nick's hot breath on my neck, but fighting off his hands as he strove to rassel me down; then, joy, oh, what joy! when I was safe inside the little church, where the Old Nick dared not enter, and I saw on the faces of the congregation the same looks I used to know at home and had missed for so long. I heard again that voice like Ma's rising high and exalted in the chorus of the hymn as the congregation sung it over:

"Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me——"

And there up the aisle a ways a woman who was almost the very picture of my dear old lady—and, oh, I felt I could cry with the joy of it—and then I was standing by that good religious woman and joining in the singing—and the revivalist's powerful voice rose shouting in exhortation—and before I knowed it, I was shuddering and sobbing over my terrible past of sin, and the good old lady's motherly hand was patting my shoulder.

Breaking down, breaking down, the old lady's prayer for "this pore lost lamb of a soldier boy" rising at my side, and, oh, the wild repentance for my army drunkenness and debaucheries, for my wicked life with Madam Odile, for my weak yielding to the sinful, blasphemous, and heathen foreigners I had been cast among, for my failure to be true to my bringing-up in my times of trial and

temptation—and it all overwhelming me until I never dare to pray for the Light to come, as I had always done at every revival meeting I'd ever knowed; but I just crouch down on my knees, shudder, sob, and repent as a sinner abject and vile, too lost for any hope of grace, and I can only call out the old gospel prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Saying it over and over with never a hope, when suddenly the Spirit takes me up with such mighty power that I am helpless as a little child. Takes me up and away and leads me like a babe to the mourners' bench. Casts me down on my knees, bows my head in humility and anguish, wipes every thought and feeling from my mind and soul, till I seem only a weak, dazed, and broken body. But, oh, I am repentant, and over and over I cry the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

And now I am lifted up again, my breast swells with such a tumult of rapture and joy as I have never known. And suddenly, with all its mighty beauty, the full glory of the Light pours on my soul, and it is cleansed, purified, and made whole in the heavenly flood of salvation and grace. Cleansed and whole, I lift mine eyes and see the road. Oh, it is stony and narrow and steep to climb, but it leads truly from the pit I have digged for myself, up to the Light and the salvation of heaven above!

Shouting "Glory!" for my salvation. The old revivalist's arms around me. The praises and prayers of my own home kind of folks sounding like angels' music in my ears. And now a sweet and beauteous calm enfolds my soul; I look my brothers and sisters in the eye, confess my sins, and curse the blasphemers and idolaters I was cast among, while the dear old sisters weep and the good old brothers shout, "Glory to God!" and "Amen!"

Oh, the wonder of that hour of salvation! Oh, if I could only have known its comfort and peace in those last dark army days! But my great hour had not yet come. It was not the will of the Almighty that I should see and know.

Now was the great hour and not only the glory in a certainty of eternal salvation blessed my soul, but my cleared eyes saw what an abomination in the sight of the Lord was the life I had lived in the army and how hateful in His sight were the sinners and idolaters I had been cast among. And I learned to despise and loath the Chicago foreigners as enemies of the true Word and the true Church. I had let my soul be subjected to their carnal iniquities. And I would repent it all my days; until I drew my dying breath, I would bitterly repent yielding to the heathenish and carnal temptations I had met in my army life. I knowed it now. I knew it well.

But I had kept the strength to repent before it was too late. That was my glory. Salvation burned in my soul with a pure white light, and I would never let it go out. I would not go astray and let it die. Nevermore would I leave from the midst of God's people, my own home kind of folks.

"I simply got to thank you again," I said to the old revivalist, when the service was done. "I was on the very brink of perdition, the Old Nick himself had me, when I heard your exhortation and it brought me into the fold."

"God bless you. It was His will. I am only His humble instrument," said the revivalist, warmly shaking my hand. "God bless you."

His voice was hoarse and strained from his effort, his bony hands were nervous, and his solemn face was pale. But he was giving everybody a Christian greeting as he

come among the congregation, which was now crowding down the aisle. I hated to bother him any more, but I felt like I simply had to let him know what kind of people my home folks were, so I said, "I wonder if you know Rev. Pret Snodgrass of Clevisburg, Kansas. He is the minister of the First M. E., to which my ma belongs. I thought——"

"Well, surely!" The old minister's black eyes brightened up with something like their exhorting fire, he mopped his shaggy hair back off his forehead, and almost got a smile on his thin mouth. "I've set with Brother Snodgrass in many a conference, of course. A fine exhorter of sound doctrine. Yes, indeed. Why, I held a protracted meeting in Clevisburg once. That was when I was first ordained. Before your time, I allow. Yes, indeed."

"Why, maybe you've met my folks, then! The Mattocks? Have a farm out just a ways from town. Pleas Mattock, my pa, he's a Hardshell; he belongs to the Tennessee Mattocks; his uncle's still a Tennessee Hardshell elder. But Ma, she's a strict Kansas Methodist. Was brung up that way. She was a Mount; Jurilda Mount her maiden name; old Kansas Methodist family, and you might know——"

"You don't say! Mount—why, yes indeed. My first presidin' elder was a Mount—Elder Micah Mount. Well, I declare! It's a small world, after all, ain't it? Now maybe I *did* know your ma. Jurilda—mm—let me figger now."

"She was of the Topeka Mounts originally. Her pa's name was Peter. Named after Elder Peter Cartwright."

"Peter Mount, you say? Well, I *do* declare! Why, I knew Peter Mount as well as my own brother! And he was your grandpa! Well, well! Say, I'll tell you. You

come right out to Mrs. Crumley's with me tonight. You are of good stock and I swear you'll make a fine up-standin' Christian American citizen your own self. I want to know you better. We'll have a good talk. You come and meet Mrs. Crumley, while I say goodbye to the brothers and sisters."

Well, and if Mrs. Crumley wasn't the same blessed old lady who looked so much like my own ma. She looked so much so that I could feel my eyes getting wet as I stood and grinned down at her while she patted me on the arm and told me about her own boy, who *would* run out to dances and the like every night, and, oh, if he would only think of his immortal soul like I had done! Good old Mrs. Crumley dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief, and I patted her back and soothed and comforted her just 'like she was my own ma, until the revivalist had said goodbye to the congregation.

My night at Mrs. Crumley's home, where I slept in a good old feather bed and woke up in the morning with a tremendous thrill of joy to remember that the glad tidings had come at last to me, made a beautiful ending for my glorious conversion. And it was a fine morning at her home, too, though at breakfast the wicked son gave me some sour looks and made some irreligious remarks under his breath about how feeding preachers and these converts would ruin his corner grocery store. But when he was gone, the revivalist, Mrs. Crumley and I set around and talked in the old Kansas country way about relations, the crops, politics, the war, and religion, till I felt like it said in the psalm, and my cup was running over with joy.

That afternoon at three o'clock I was home, and my joy was still lasting. The glory of salvation was still blazing in my soul, and I had not yet realized that I must climb

the stony, narrow way, perform good works, and bear a cross. The misery and torment of my last army days was held back, but only for a while. I was soon to know the burden and feel the thorns.

But not yet. Not now, when Ma was crying in my arms, running her old wrinkled hands over my face and through my hair, down over my gold chevrons, up over the corporal's stripes, which I had forgot to take off again, and crying out again and again, "My own big old boy! He's come safe to his ma, safe and sound, his own self! My prayers have been answered in full! The Almighty be praised for His mercy!"

Not now, with my good old pa, looking feeble and thin from his long, winter's sickness, leaning on a cane, shaking and shaking my hand, and saying in a weak voice, "Shore good to see you, Parve. I was afeard mebbe I warn't goin' to last. But it's the Lord's blessin'. Shore good to see you. I expect you to take over the place, Parvin, as I'm too porely to run it any longer."

My good old pa! My dear old lady! And what wonderful news I had to tell!

"Listen, Pa and Ma. I know you often thought how sinful and temptin' the army life must be; and it was, as I know for my eternal sorrow and repentance; but I have come out of it cleansed and whole. Oh, I have! Listen, my dear old folks. I'm not only your boy, but I can now call myself truly your brother in Christ!"

Well, it was jubilation and thanksgiving over my return then sure enough. I laid back on the comfortable old sofa in the setting-room, and the old folks brought their rocking-chairs over by me, after all their prayers and crying were done, and I confessed everything, just like I had done to cleanse my soul at the revival.

How I'd tried so hard to be a Christian American soldier at the first, but had been dragged into a mire of sin which I got deeper into the harder I tried to get out of it; how I drank wine and cognac and was even tempted by painted girls when I went to Paris; how I tried to be a Christian American soldier again by doing intelligence work against the Bolsheviks that was like the Methodist work against the liquor traffic; how I was so dragged down by the irreligious and idolatrous foreigners of the company on account of this work until I was ready to let all holts go; and how, finally I had found salvation almost by a miracle at a little revival in Kansas City.

I told the story as humbly and repentingly as I knowed how, but the old folks praised me over and over for the strength I had showed when the hour of trial really come; and, oh, how glorious it was to feel that I was one with them in spirit, as well as of their flesh and blood! For a good hour we talked a stream, and at the end it seemed like we had only begun. Ma, bless her heart, soon saw that my army experiences had left a lot of sore spots, and she kept the talk mostly on the things that had happened while I was gone. Especially on what Elsie Snodgrass had been doing.

"The sweetest, most religious girl in the whole town of Clevisburg, and the best to her folks," said Ma. And then she went on in the most innocent way, "I want to see my boy married and settled down soon. As a Christian young man, you ought to be married and settled down, Parvin."

I never had to figure a minute to know what she was getting at. I winked at Pa, but he only set and looked as solemn as ever, his cane standing between his knees, and his gnarled old hands resting on the cane. He could never

read Ma's mind like a book, as I could. But I never let on. I just told Ma I expected she was right and went to telling her about how the revivalist had known Gran'pa Peter Mount in Topeka long ago. We gossiped about that for a while, and then Ma said she had to get supper going, and I went out to take a look over the farm again.

It appeared better to me than ever it had, as I thought of how I would have to run it now, with Pa so poorly that he probably wasn't long for this world. A real pride about the farm grew in me as I walked through the barn lot, looked over the Holsteins in the green, spring pasture, smelled the blooms of the apple trees, and feasted my eyes on the rich black soil of the cornfield, where the hired man was driving Harve and Dave, still the fat old Percherons, along on the corn-planter. The finest farm of its size for miles around. And it was the same as mine right now. But I thought humbly about it. I knowed that if it hadn't been for the grace of the Almighty, I'd have been tempted into shunning it all and settling into a life of miserable city toil and sin. But I had been given the chance to repent, and here I was, with everything around the same as mine. The fields, the stock, the buildings, the house that I was born in—I roved everywhere and looked over everything, and though I was proud to think the fine farm had been built up so good, still I was humble when I thought about it being the same as mine.

There was my dear old lady waving a dishcloth from the back porch.

In a little while I was eating her wonderful cooking again. Fried chicken, a heaping, brown platter of it. Mashed potatoes and cream gravy. Home-canned string beans and sweet corn. Thick, fluffy biscuits, fresh butter and jell, preserved peaches, canned cherries, jelly layer-

cake and custard pie. A jug of real cream for my coffee. I wished for a cigarette when I had stuffed myself full, but it was only a second till I had smashed down the thought of that sin. I smashed it down, and then I smiled at Ma, and my dear old lady's eyes smiled over her specs at me. And I guess we were both thinking about the same thing, and that was whether I'd ever find anybody to run this house for me as she had run it for Pa.

Well, a night come mighty soon when I found somebody, right enough, the night I was admitted to membership in Rev. Snodgrass's church. Ever since my conversion I'd felt in my soul that Elsie Snodgrass was the wife the Lord had always intended for me; and as I walked home with her this night after services, I realized the feeling was true.

In the moonlight I walked quietly by her side, looking at her serious face, her very slender figure, which appeared slenderer yet in the kind of long, tan dress which she nearly always wore, and I thought of what a good girl she was, as anybody could tell just by looking at her. Then I thought of how such a good, serious girl would be such a wonderful helpmeet for a really religious young man, where a high-flying girl like that trashy Lola Bandon would only lead him into sin and ruin him. I thought that way as we walked along, about how much better Elsie's goodness was than just trashy handsomeness; and at last I become so sure it was better that I put my arm around her very slender figure and took holt of her cool hand.

"Well, Elsie——"

"Well, Parvin——"

No fussing and fooling, but just getting sensibly engaged, like two serious-minded religious young folks should. Talking our future over soberly together, and that

was all. All our times together spent in talking over how we could be real helpmeets to each other and live religious, useful lives.

It was to be a mighty good future, as any was bound to be with such serious planning and religious purpose. It was about all real good times ahead, more than making up for my army troubles. I was to get along real well. With me not only keeping the farm up and building the best Holstein herd in the neighborhood, after my good old pa went to his eternal reward, but, under Elsie's urging and help, doing more than my share in the church and fraternal work of Clevisburg, getting to be such a figure in the Legion, such an influence in the church, and so powerful in the Klan that I was elected to the school board and was sent as the Clevisburg delegate to the Legion convention at Kansas City.

There I was to hear Captain Frank Lindon Dill introduced as the author who had become famous before the war through his novel, *Wyoming Lad*, and who had become famous all over again through his great war novel, *God's Crusaders*; and after he had made his fine speech, "Conserve our Wartime Idealism," I was to have him shake my hand and introduce me to a great general as "one of the most patriotic soldiers in the American Expeditionary Forces, truly one of God's crusaders, sir!" I was to meet Doc Makin there, too, and hear from him about Junie Tadousac quitting Johnny Hard in Chicago to go out to Hollywood to act in the movies, and about Johnny Hard joining Black Jean in Mexico, where they were both in the army and probably drinking themselves to death. I was to be surprised to hear that Sergeant Shevlin had married the daughter of a wealthy cattleman, who was nobody else but that liar of a Missoula Red. I

was to get a shock when we went out to decorate some Kansas City veterans' graves, and I come on Joe Beedy's before I knowed it; and before I knowed it, too, the miserable, sickening, sullen, bitter feelings come back to bow me down, and just about spoiled my time at the convention.

The way they would come back, that was my cross. I could realize what the Beedys were, just wicked, poverty-stricken Swamp Creekers; and it was plain to me ever since my conversion that I could never have got along for good with anyone who had the Beedy blood, any more than I could with anybody who had the Bandon's. I never had to figure on it a particle. But still I would get miserable feelings about Joe Beedy. I could see as plain as day that a man like First Sergeant Novak was simply a contemptible Roman of a foreigner, and that it was simply his sinful nature to hate a young Christian American like me, but I could never get over seeing the savage scowl the first sergeant had wore when he ripped me up one side and down the other at Brest. And I could never get over hearing his remarks, and remembering how the New York Jews and the Chicago foreigner non-coms had kept hammering them into me all the two weeks we were crossing the ocean. And always the old torment would return. The memory was my cross and thorns. And I had to bear it, that was the only way I could figure it out.

Certainly there hadn't been such a great lot to the words. The big black brute of a skull-cracker had just stepped up to me when the doctors were through with the inspection, and had started in with a bawling-out about my looks, with the whole company standing there listening, and never giving me a chance to explain how I'd

come to let myself get into such a shape, and finally he declared that if he had his way, he'd have me kicked off the ship to do hard labor here till all the troops were home; and why in hell the captain wouldn't stand for it, he didn't know. And then he went to shaking his fist under my nose and yelling so many threats that I felt so sick and miserable I simply couldn't help it; my eyes got wet and my nose run, and I had to haul out my bandana; but all the sympathy I had from that contemptible foreigner was for him to let out a string of profanity, snap and snarl a few more times, and then just spit out these infernal words:

"Yeah, bawl about it. Snivel and bawl, you cootie-hearted bum! Yeah, old Cootie Heart, that's you, by Jeezus! You don't catch 'em on the outside, you hatch 'em inside, and now they've just begun to crawl through. That's it. Shevlin's got it right. You can't help it. I know it now. And there's just one reason I let you live. If I was to lay my hands on you, by Jeezus, they'd feel dirty all the rest of my days. Keep clear of me, or I might forget it. That's all."

And there I not only had to take that, but I had to listen to it over and over till I was discharged and free. I had to listen to it when the New York Jews made jokes about me being sick at the stomach from the ocean. I had to listen to it when my appetite come back and I would crawl out of the bunk and join the mess line. "Here's the bird that nearly got the company shot back to camp." "Yeah, he had to bawl when the top told him nobody loved him." "Oi, chure, he tells de top kick, see, he's nobody's sweetheart, and the top makes him his cootie heart, see." "Haw-haw, say Izzy, 'at's a good one." "How's our

old Cootie Heart seh swear, huh?" Day after day the ignorant, senseless joshing like that was what I had to bear.

I could never forget it, not even after my conversion, not even when everything was going so fine, and I was reaping my rewards for living the life of a Christian American citizen. And finally I come to know that the memory was my cross. The most miserable little thing would bring it to mind; all the old sullen, bitter feelings would return; and I would writhe, groan, and suffer as I thought I had once got so lost in sin that an ignorant Romish foreigner of a first sergeant could bow me down into a torment of shame for what I'd come to see was the only patriotic and Christian work I'd ever done in the army.

It is so. I am humble and meek under the divine will. I bear a cross because in my time of sin I was ashamed and sorrowful over good works. That is the truth I have figured out. For now in my righteousness I am ashamed only of the sin, but proud of the good works. And it is when I am suffering the hardest oppression from the cross I bear that my soul is the most inspired to eternally fight the good fight against law-breakers, Reds, Romans, and foreigners. But, oh, the memory is heavy, cruel and burdensome to bear! How I managed to live through my last army days, and then come home with my soul cleansed and whole, I've never been able to figure out; and probably the Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, is the only one who will ever know.



A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN
WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

This book is composed on the Linotype in Old Style No. 7. This face is largely based on a series originally cut by the Bruce Foundry in the early seventies and that in its turn appears to have followed, in all essentials, the details of a face designed and cut, some years before, by the celebrated Edinburgh type founders, Miller and Richard. It has always been a popular and satisfactory face for book work because while it is compactly designed, so that a large number of words appear on a page, its compactness is not accompanied by any loss in legibility. Old Style No. 7, composed in a page gives a subdued color and even texture which makes it easily and comfortably read.



SET UP, ELECTROTYPED, PRINTED
AND BOUND BY THE VAIL-BALLOU
PRESS, BINGHAMTON, N. Y. • PA-
PER MANUFACTURED BY W. C.
HAMILTON & SONS, MIQUON,
PA., AND FURNISHED BY
W. F. ETHERINGTON &
CO., NEW YORK





